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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# The Appeal of the Mass-Market Romance

by

Clare-Elizabeth Gautier-Villon

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.
(Presented for final oral examination under the title The Appeal of the Romance: Suggestions)

Department of Comparative Literature and Film Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
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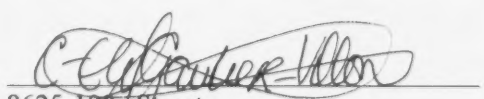

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Appeal of the Romance: Suggestions submitted by Clare-Elizabeth Gautier-Villon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

Milan V. Dimić

George M. Lang

Uri Margolin

April 8, 1994

**"Our almost-instinct almost true"**

This work is dedicated to:

my little dog Boo
(the good thing about my marriage)

and my husband Denis
("He was her best thing.")

Thanks also to all those romance readers
who answered all my questions without
ever asking why

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the possible reasons for the appeal of mass-market romance novels. A romance novel is defined as one in which the developing non-platonic relationship between the male and female protagonists provides the main incentive for the plot. A romance reader, while recognising that romance is a mass medium which contains variances in every individual text, can interpret the intense codes of romance writing.

Ideological arguments regarding romances are inconclusive, based as they are on a priori assumptions regarding the real world. Opponents of the genre have consistently found the characters of the protagonists, and the literary quality of a few specific texts problematic. In fact, romances must be read en masse to allow the reader to become conversant with, and sensitive to, the codes of romance narrative.

The relationship of the romance reader to the text is complex and variable. Romances rely heavily on the diegetic mode, with such features as the repetition of key near-synonyms, and portrayal of conventional details, often those emphasising the difference between the genders, helping to clarify the reader's horizon of expectations. The protagonists represent contrasting elements which must combine; while reading, the reader is free to identify with whichever side of the dialectic carries the impetus of the narrative.

Romance deals with infantile but archetypal desires. Some of the most-used plots can be construed as having mythic underpinnings, like the rape of Persephone. The text itself often draws such comparisons. Such explicit allusions, along with the over-coded writing described above, form the particular style labeled romance code. This occurs at its most extreme in dress historicals, novels where the supposed setting serves as a backdrop to both enhance the glamour of the portrayed world, and reassure the reader that such a world is divorced from her own.

While the plot functions can be combined and presented in a variety of guises, the tensions generated in the text remain remarkably constant. Having been lured into a voyeuristic, androgynous mode of reading, all the tensions are resolved, and both text and reader participate in the happy ending.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


page

Chapter One: Super-Genre in Flux: the ever-changing system of the romance ..... 1

Chapter Two: For and Against: why ideological arguments are irrelevant to the appeal of the romance ..... 23

"The lady or the tiger" ..... 24
"Fear and loathing in the critical canon" ..... 32
"He's my thing" ..... 35
"She's in love with the man that she always wanted to be" ..... 39
"Eat the peach (words so sad)" ..... 50
"The world well lost" ..... 53

Chapter Three: The Semi-Demotics of Romance Sex: a polarised dichotomy ..... 56

"What kind of man is he?" ..... 59
"Revelations of the bedchamber" ..... 63
"The wor(l)d begetting, by the wor(l)d begot" ..... 66
"Honi soit qui mal y pense" ..... 71
"The vanitas of sex" ..... 76
"You've got to see my body full of charms" ..... 80
"Put money in your idol hole" ..... 86
"Happily ever after?" ..... 88

Chapter Four: Deep-Seated Problems: the morphology of the romance plot ..... 90

"Out of the text" ..... 92
"To wish impossible things" ..... 97
"good Quick reads" ..... 99
"As we forgive those who trespass against us" ..... 107
"The cult of motherhood" ..... 115
"The peace which surpasseth understanding" ..... 119

Chapter Five: The Wet Text: the codes of romance ..... 122
"Tell me a story about how you adore me" ..... 123
"Jesus' blood never failed me yet" ..... 132
"Surely Shakespeare is wicked" ..... 135
"You (never) leave me dry" ..... 139
"From paradigm to periphery--breaking the code" ..... 142
"Boys don't cry" ..... 145

Chapter Six: Plus ça Change: the critical eye concludes ..... 150
"We missed you hissed the lovecats" ..... 151
"The absent abstinent text" ..... 153
"Between animals and angels" ..... 157

Bibliography ..... 161
A: Critical Texts on Popular Romance ..... 161
B: Other Critical Texts ..... 163
C: Selected Fiction Bibliography ..... 169

Appendix ..... 173

## LIST OF FIGURES

page

Figure 1.1 ..... 16
Series Summary Chart (as of December 1993)

Figure 4.1 ..... 91
Schema of Romance Characters

Figure 4.2 ..... 99
Summary of Amanda Quick Novels

Figure 4.3 ..... 106
Plot Functions in Amanda Quick Novels

# CHAPTER ONE

## SUPER-GENRE IN FLUX:

## the ever-changing system of the romance

> Quality is irrelevant--ask Madonna's accountant.
> Andrew Hultkrans, Mondo 2000

> Those of us who respond to tales of romance understand that such stories are a vital and enduring part of women's fiction. These are tales filled with strong, honorable heroes and heroines who are committed to positive, enduring values. They are tales that celebrate the life-affirming power of love. This world needs more of our kind of stories.
> Amanda Quick

As it takes 5 000 copies sold for a book to be considered a Canadian bestseller, all the spots on the bestseller Canadian lists should most certainly be occupied, all the time, by various Canadian romance authors (Mallet 21-22). For a romance belonging to a series, an average print run is about 150 000 copies sold in North America, with 200 000 considered a good sale (ibid.). This does not include foreign translations, which can double the profit a writer, and presumably also the publisher, makes on a novel. Love is not only vaster than empires, it can create them. Series romance, in particular, is strictly regulated by the various elements of the romance industry, including publishers and authors as well as conferences and magazines such as Romantic Times. This is sometimes referred to as "The Bible", and consists of reviews of most new romances published, as well as industry news and self-promotion. The readers themselves are, of course, of prime importance. The romance industry successfully promotes itself as a glamourous, empowered career alternative to capable women.

This study attempts to elucidate the appeal of the genre. To this end, an overview of the types of mass-market romance novels available in North America today is presented along with information about the romance audience. Since the genre is so often maligned by those who are not particularly familiar with it, a survey of the various ideological oppositions is also included, with special emphasis on the issue which engenders the most heated discussion--the treatment of sexuality. I also hope to propose a theory of how romance readers decode the texts.

The study then shifts focus to assess more closely the erotic historical, simply because these are the texts with which I am most familiar. Both the plot structures and the surface of the texts are examined, using the novels of Amanda Quick as the central corpus. Quick (a.c. Jayne Ann Krentz) is chosen because she is prolific, popular, has many industry awards, and is an outspoken advocate of romance writing. The aim of this section of the study is to determine which of the two--the what or the how--is more essential to the appeal of the romance. Finally, I speculate briefly on how romance studies are infiltrating other mass media. To begin with, I wish to try and identify the romance reader.

Who reads romances? The short answer is that romance readers in North America constitute a perfect textbook cross-section of the statistical average woman [1]. Romance readers spread across the educational scale in almost exactly the same proportion as the general public. In 1982, Thurston found that 32% of the whole American population had between one to three years of college, while a further 16.2% actually had at least one degree. Among romance readers, 32.2% had between one and three years of college, with 16.3% having at least one degree. Over one-third of romance readers with a degree had a graduate degree (33.8% Master's, 2.5% PhD). Therefore romance readers do not appear to be less educated than the general

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[1] Most of the readership information comes from Thurston Chapter Six: Romancing Women Readers--Who's Running This Revolution? (113-138) although Mann also provides corroborating data. Thurston's sample of five hundred and two women is self-chosen, consisting of those who from a random sampling of six hundred respondents to a publisher's survey included in a Richard Gallen romance agreed to complete and return Thurston's more detailed questionnaire. She re-questioned the same group of women in 1984. However, this compares favourably to Radway's control group of forty-two readers, all of whom were suggested by a local bookseller. Other critics often rely entirely on their own judgement, even after admitting they are not romance readers. Robinson is an exception; she is both a romance reader, and critical of the texts.

population. The average family income of the romance reader is approximately the same as the income of the average family [2]. Romance sells across North America, both in rural and urban areas [3]. In 1985, Thurston queried her control group regarding several current socio-political issues (abortion rights, equal pay) and found that while readers' opinions spanned the ideological spectrum, the majority were "egalitarian in attitude--not traditional" (123).

In Thurston's 1982 sample, 35% of readers are between twenty-six and thirty-five, with another 30% falling in the thirty-six to forty-five age range. Many of the writers in Krentz and writers such as LaVyrle Spencer (qtd in Radway 68) began reading (and later writing) romance after the publication of Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's The Flame and the Flower in 1972. Therefore, it would seem plausible, as the romance market continues to expand, that a greater proportion of readers today would be older than forty-five as opposed to 20% in 1982. Given the aggressive marketing campaigns involving public promotion of such cover models as Fabio and the Topaz Man Steve Sandalis and frequent ads in magazines such as People, it could also be that more younger readers are attracted to the genre. And of course, the diversified genre, with more types of novels, both in format and content, to choose from than ever before, is probably a factor in the continuing success of romance.

Although Thurston's control group is small and any conclusions will therefore be tentative, it appears that the romance reader deviates from the societal norm in three telling ways. The first deviation is that romance readers watch far less television than non-readers, although this is true of readers in general (Mann). The average Canadian buys six books a year; a romance reader, six to eight (romance) books a month (Mallet 22). Only 17% of Thurston's sample limited their reading to romance, so that the total number of books romance readers buy may be even higher. The correlation of more reading time/less television viewing time highlights what

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[2] Thurston's conclusion is supported by findings in Mann (103) and Mallet (22).

[3] However, different types of romance sell better in different areas; the "heartland" prefers sweet romances and Texans prefer Westerns, to give just two examples. Such information is informally (non-quantitatively) presented in the Romantic Times monthly column "Bookstore News", which features reports by romance booksellers across North America.

many academic critics have apparently forgotten: that for the vast majority of people, reading is a leisure time activity, meant to be entertaining and enjoyable. (In fact, one of the companies that publishes romance is called Leisure Books.) Academics and critics often read novels and biographies as a necessary part of their job; they are evaluated on how well they read. This is not a normal pattern of reading fiction, as most people read fiction primarily for entertainment. Regarding the high rate of consumption of these novels, romance author Kathleen Gilles Seidel points out that most leisure time activities are meant to be repeated, to have time spent on them (176). Due to this high rate of consumption, it must be emphasised that the percentage of mass paperback sales that romances account for does not correlate to an equal percentage of the reading public being regular romance readers.

The second variation in the population reading romance is that a high proportion of them are married, 70.7% of Thurston's sample, compared with 60.8% of the 1984 American adult female population. The "bored housewife" image of the romance reader is proposed by many critics of the romance including Mussell, Modleski, and Radway. In a classic example of the Critic as Other, Snitow refers to "catatonic secretaries" (143), and Rabine apparently pegs romance readers in the same category. According to the above-cited critics, this further "proves" that the readers must be using romance to escape from something, since they are oppressed by being married (or working in a traditional female occupation). Thurston and Seidel, who incidentally both hold PhDs and are therefore able to counter academic attacks by assessing the underlying ideological assumptions, combat that assertion most thoroughly. Seidel's angry, lucid essay contains these words:

> Feminists talk about sisterhood; I do not know how deeply they feel it. The undercurrent throughout feminist criticism of romances is that these scholars and critics know what is right for other women [...There is] a strong sense of the reader as Other, as someone less enlightened, less analytic--more likely to wear a lavender pantsuit [4] --than the critic (172).

---

[4] This is a reference to Radway, who begins _Reading the Romance_ by claiming that she was wary of meeting the romance bookseller who was to introduce her to the control group, since the woman had identified herself as the lady who would be wearing a lavender pantsuit. Radway admits she was surprised at finding the woman likeable. Coming from a critic who claims that discrimination based on class and gender is debilitating, this is a curiously elitist

And, as Thurston asks, "Is to simply be married [...] synonymous with being a 'housewife,' with all the implicitly derogative baggage appended thereto?" (116). It is a rhetorical question. The critics cannot be exonerated, but Eileen Fallon, in Words of Love, appends biographies of many romance writers; some, such as Joan Aitken and LaVyrle Spencer, try to avoid the label "romance", at least "partly because of the stigma" (Spencer qtd in Thurston 181). Jensen at least is accurate when she claims that the romance reader is "Mrs. Average America" (141-2), but she still implies that the average American woman is a housewife. 59% of Thurston's 1985 sample were occupied full-time outside the house, with many respondents claiming they were both full-time housewives and full-time employees outside the house (117). This does not appear to support suggestions that romance readers are bored, nor assertions that they are unknowing slaves to patriarchy. Further, as Seidel states, "Romances are not the only influences women encounter" (173), and the rapidly changing content in the novels indicates that romance readers tend to be discriminating with regards to which types of romance they find most palatable. By blaming men for everything that goes on in women's lives, some critics are surely giving men far more imagined power than they attain in the most subservient romance.

The third notable variation from the norm is that in Thurston's 1982 sample, 91% of readers were white; the American adult female population was 85% white at that time (121). Considering how closely the income and education curves matched those of the general population, this six percent deviation is significant. Although there is an increasing incidence of non-white characters in romance, it is almost always the hero, and he is almost always part or full American Indian in North American works, or Arabic in Mills and Boon-produced novels (i.e., Harlequin Presents). One possible explanation for this is that both the Arabic and the AmerIndian cultures are perceived as exotic, yet Arabs and AmerIndians do not look strikingly different from non-Semitic pale-skinned Caucasians. In fact, while romances are incorporating more diverse elements, and addressing some important

---

attitude.

social issues, it must be noted that both the visual illustrations of characters and author's pseudonyms tend markedly towards the Anglo-Saxon. Authors are often required to adopt pseudonyms, particularly by series publishers, so that if an author changes publishers, her name will not be a marketable asset to the second publisher, developed at a cost to the first. Male writers adopt female pseudonyms, since "women readers prefer to see a romantic-sounding name on a romance cover, but they don't object to a male author revealing himself after he has established himself with a few titles" (Falk 315). One Alberta author, whose last name was Archimbeault, was asked to adopt the penname Archer, which was felt to be easier to pronounce, and therefore less intimidating. Regardless of the reasoning, Archer is an Anglo-Saxon name; Archimbeault isn't. There are specialised publishing houses dealing with ethnic and cross-racial romances (Romance in Black and Odyssey Books, Inc), but their novels are not reviewed in Romantic Times and they do not appear to have a wide-spread distribution. They are not included in this study [5]. However, according to Romantic Times, Zebra will launch a "multi-cultural" line in summer 1994 (December 1993, 9).

As Mallet states, "Harlequin has piggy-backed its paperback series on the worldwide success of North American pop culture" (20). She notes that Harlequin "offers translations in 24 languages" but that "the covers remain unchanged or very similar--and mostly Caucasian--and the copy is translated to remain essential Harlequinese" (ibid.). Every book Harlequin or its local joint publishing partners (such as Axel Springer in Germany and Hachette in France) publishes in languages other than English is taken from the Harlequin list of books either published or under contract, all of which are written in English. Such books are then translated into the language appropriate to the country of distribution.

However, as Martin has demonstrated, Harlequins distributed in Québec are translated into français primordial by French translators (75, 132). The translators

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[5] Naiad Press publishes Harlequeers, and there are several small houses which print Christian living romances. In fact, while voyaging across the Prairies this summer, often the only novels available in small town gas station stores were the Christian romances. However, I have never seen them in a non-religious bookstore in large cities. These romances are also not included in this study.

used by Harlequin and its subsidiaries are not named in the text (134). One could tentatively conclude that this practice of not naming translators is maintained no matter what the target language is. Authors can be translated without their prior consent; one Calgary author recently received a shipment of a Silhouette Romance she published in 1992, in its Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian translated versions. According to Martin, there were two short-lived experiments in the early eighties which did not use texts originally produced in English. Harlequin Mystique featured English translations of French language originals licensed from the Paris publisher Jules Tallander, and Harlequin Colombines were originally written in français primordial and distributed in Québec (131). Although there may be publishers in other languages producing books suitable for publication as series romance, Harlequin is the worldwide leader in this field, due in no small part to its aggressive marketing techniques. Mallet's pop culture theory, implying Anglo cultural imperialism, appears correct.

Other types of romance translated into Québecois mentioned by Martin are in the main contemporary mainstreams, especially such well-known authors as Mary Stewart and Danielle Steel. These same writers are also translated into français primordial (Livre de Poche publishes Judith Krantz). Historicals seem to be absent in Martin's lists; this is perhaps because her survey ends in 1982--historicals have become steadily more popular over the last few years. It should be noted here that one of the most often-cited (e.g., Falk 201) precursors to today's historicals is the Angélique series by Sergeanne Golon, first published in France in 1960. However, in general, there is a definite Anglo-Saxon bias in mainstream romance publishing, which may well be indicative of popular culture as a whole.

One further fact pertaining to romance readers, emphasised both by the respondents to Thurston's surveys and by the writers in Krentz's anthology, is that they do, in fact, view it as a leisure activity, and that the primary reason for reading these novels is entertainment. As reading is a leisure activity that takes little in the way of equipment, or particular location, readers can indulge almost anywhere. Thurston clarifies:

> Though the human need for entertainment, for relaxation and relief from stress, is as basic and normal as the need for sleep and food, women who seek to fulfil this need through romantic fantasy are assumed to be doing so because of their impoverished intellectual or emotional lives. No empirical evidence to support this assumption is available to date (131).

Conversely, there are no studies that I am aware of attempting to find out if players of golf, a game that was until recently reserved for well-off whites, are repressing anything. And romance readers, as demonstrated above, are neither necessarily poor nor badly-educated. There remains one factor in which romance readership differs from the general population, a factor that is so understood by anyone approaching the topic of romance fiction that it is scarcely ever highlighted. The overwhelming majority of romance readers are women, and the profitable romance industry is largely inhabited by and celebratory of women.

Sociological critics have found romance to be reactionary, supportive of the capitalist culture industry. Feminist critics have found romances to be repressive, supportive of misogyny. Psycho-analytic critics have found romances to be regressive, enforcing a child-like dependence on an authority figure. Literary critics scoff at the style, at the predictable plots, with the endings a given before the book is opened. Yet women read them. Perhaps in all honesty it now behooves critics not to focus on what romances are not (avant-garde unique expressions of the views of individual geniuses for the future) and instead focus on what they are.

Camille Paglia believes, not without justification, that Western culture glorifies in "thing-making" (30), which in humanist societies often translates into a glorification of the individual. Genius is unique. What may perhaps offend many traditional critics who believe in promoting "good" or "high" literature (as E.D. Hirsch does when he mourns American cultural literacy), is that romance, by and large, has no interest in, and no use for, the unique. I hope to demonstrate that romance readers become accustomed to core plot structures and character types, and most importantly, to specific textual triggers and types of descriptions. My hypothesis is that after a number of novels have been read, readers begin to read

cumulatively, each text resounding with remembered echoes of other texts which are so similar. This heightens the emotional impact of the romance text.

It is interesting that a supposedly Marxist-influenced critic such as Leo Lowenthal would deride popular culture in part for the levelling effect he feels it imposes on individuals (185). Like a traditional critic might, he deplores "the hollowing out of language" (192), not attempting to understand the appeal of any repetitive reading process. He feels that mass media products "expedite flight from reality" (195) and that they promote a "false fulfilment of wish-dreams" (ibid.). These last two assertions form the basis of much feminist criticism of romance novels. Lowenthal is correct when he states that popular culture both provides models for and expressions of the average (presumably societally repressed) person's life (196). However, both he and feminists apparently find the starting point of most texts (the actual world) unbearable. He also, like many feminist critics, does not appear to comprehend that one may have many desires one only wishes to explore in fantasy. In short, romance's critics tend to presume a passive readership. The exceptions are psycho-analytic critics who believe that romance readers are actively seeking to assuage perverse needs.

I believe that this is far from the case, that in fact romance reading presupposes a particular contract not only of expectations, but of shared references between writer and reader, which are fulfilled in a largely ludic manner. Unfortunately I have neither the time nor the resources to conduct a "scientific" (if such a thing is even possible) survey of the manner in which romance readers decode texts. I have had to rely on comments made and answers to questions given by romance readers of my acquaintance, a group of about twenty-five women. Furthermore, my comments on the romance reading process refer to ideal romances, not to texts found disappointing or lacking. Although in the next few pages I will attempt to present an overview of the entire romance genre, in the following chapters, I focus on historical romances. It should be stated clearly that within series there are many recent developments, such as the introduction of paranormal and social problem elements, which could profitably be examined. Many mainstream romances have

made the transition between media from text to television miniseries, yet I hardly mention them at all. The romance genre is too vast for it to be clearly examined in its entirety within the confines of one thesis.

Most of the critical derision of romance novels focuses on category romances, specifically Harlequin Presents. The Presents line, founded in 1973, remained for many years the flagship line of the Canadian Harlequin publishing house, even though Presents (and Romance) were originally reprints from the English house Mills and Boon. In fact, editorial control of the above-mentioned two lines is shortly to be returned to the London offices of the TorStar subsidiary that Mills and Boon is today. This is perhaps because the North American editorial offices wish to focus their attention on more innovative formulas, such as the new Silhouette Shadows line. TorStar, the Toronto Star corporation, owns both Harlequin and its largest "competitor", Silhouette.

The Presents and Romance lines represent only a specifically delineated area within contemporary romance, which is so diverse (not surprising considering its lion's share of the market), that it should perhaps more properly be referred to as a supergenre (Landers 13). According to Romantic Times, there are approximately 120 new paperback romances published per month in North America. Those novels which appear first in hardcover are only reviewed if they are by an already well-accepted romance writer; for example Deception by Amanda Quick was reviewed, as her previous seven novels were published in paperback. Currently accounting for between 44 to 46% of mass paperback sales (Mallet 19) and with sales still increasing, they are a lucrative proposition for publishers like Harlequin. Even "reputable" publishing houses, like HarperCollins and Viking Penguin USA also have romance divisions. (In fact, Penguin has two: Topaz and Onyx historical romances.) The profits from these books help underwrite the publication of "serious" literature. With so many books published in North America, and with such a vast readership, romance itself can no longer be easily categorized.

In How to Write a Romance and Get it Published, Romantic Times publisher Kathryn Falk divides this sprawling paraliterary kingdom into five main phyla: series

or category romance, mainstream contemporary, historicals, Regencies and romantic suspense (5). However, currently, there are at least two other possible categories, which, although they may overlap with Falk's divisions, still have specific characteristics. Time-travels often use a contemporary beginning as a framing device for a historical setting, featuring a historical hero and a contemporary (but temporally displaced) heroine. This combination allows both for conflict between the protagonists, and for humour, due to their varying societal mores and expectations. It can be seen that plot devices popular in other genres are infiltrating romance; in fact, Diana Gabaldon, author of the extraordinarily successful time-travel romance Outlander (1991), claimed that she was initially inspired by an episode of Doctor Who [6]. Still, Outlander was marketed as a historical romance, and time-travels can generally be considered as a sub-set of historicals. Paranormal romances, where the inexplicable forms a large part of the plot, are also popular. They can be contemporary or historical in setting, and the inexplicable occurs in mainstream and category romances. In fact, time-travels could strictly speaking be considered paranormal, although they are not categorised as such in the review section of Romantic Times.

Regencies combine historical and category traits; although it is unorthodox, the severe limitations of this genre mean that it will be considered here as a category. Likewise, romantic suspense is a hybrid; there is a romantic suspense series (Intrigue), and many thriller contemporaries. The only writer of historical romantic suspense with any large sales figures is the late Eleanor Burford Hibbert, who wrote under the name Victoria Holt, among others.

The mainstream contemporary romance is almost impossible to categorise, due to the variety of plot types and settings that are considered conducive to a (fictional) romance. Glitz and glamour was a big seller in the late seventies and eighties, exemplified by Judith Krantz, but there are also epic or family romances, which focus

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[6] Cited in "Diana Gabaldon, Outlander and the Intuitive Process," by Christina Lynn Whited. I received a photocopy of this article at a Romance Writers of Edmonton meeting in 1992, and have no further publishing data.

on both the business and personal intrigues of a (usually) wealthy family, and thrillers and spy novels, in which the hero (or heroine) uncovers a mystery with the aid of the protagonist of opposite sex. The hard-core romance rules regarding the developing pattern of the relationship can be discarded, but many popular contemporary romance novelists do retain the hard-edged "Alpha male", and the drawn-out conflict, often due to a misunderstanding, between the protagonists. Examples of such writers would include Krantz (in Princess Daisy), Beverly Byrne, Judith McNaught, and Janet Dailey, who began her career by becoming the first North American writer signed to Harlequin Presents.

Of the main divisions of romance novels, even the most formulaic, category romance, ranges from sex-heavy Temptations and Desires to the sweet Regencies to mystery-oriented Intrigues. Yet the series which was prominent in the early eighties when romance publishing was first attracting critical interest due to the huge increase in sales was Harlequin Presents. Presents is a highly entropic system; it may be inferred that sales are falling, while sales of newer, more innovative lines are increasing. Clearly, changes in the romance market are not being met by Presents. It is intellectually dishonest to attempt to claim for Harlequin Presents a representative role in the romance schema, particularly not at present, when single title historicals are in the ascendancy [7].

In the interests of an informed discussion, series romances currently available in North America must be looked at as an entire system. Series romances, or categories, as they are often called by writers, are those novels which have guidelines as to length, setting (temporal and/or geographical), types of hero and heroine (age, occupation, nationality), and other interests. They are short novels, either usually in the 55 000 or the 75 000 word range (for the more complex novels), published at a set number of books per month, and are available both through mail order and

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[7] Noted by Seidel (168). According to the "Series Romance Ratings" column in Romantic Times, Presents recently dropped the number of books published per month from eight to six, Romance is down to four books a month from eight a few years ago, and Presents Plus has been added to the Harlequin lines. From early 1992 until very recently, Presents and Romance were both closed to new manuscripts, as there was a rumoured two to three years' backlog of novels from established authors accepted for publication. This time lapse between writing and publication, and the fact that no new authors were accepted during this time period, adds to the impression of the predictable, unchanging Presents.

through book, drug and convenience stores, where they have a shelf-life of one month. This is Harlequin's forte. Harlequin is (at least in the romance field) the originator of the infamous "tip sheets". Of the three publishing houses represented here, Bantam's tip sheets are the most precise, then Harlequins, while Silhouette's tips sheets read like advertisements for the books, and are unhelpful in the extreme [8]. In any case, the repeated assertions of publishers and writers that the actual novels themselves must be read before attempting to write one would be true.

Currently there are sixty-odd series romances published each month in North America, ranging from "straight" romances (where the developing relationship is the only focal point, and dramatic tension arises from conflicts within the couple) to paranormal, mystery and social issue romances. Despite the misgivings of Jayne Ann Krentz ("Taming the Romance" 107-114), it can be seen that the changing political climate has dramatically altered the romance; Bettinotti et al. find that even Presents and Romance form "un corpus qui obéit rapidement à la mouvance sociale (évolution des moeurs, travail extérieur des femmes, revendications féministes, etc.)" (8).

The series summary chart (Figure 1.1) is based on publishing information presented in Romantic Times, in Thurston, and in Falk; the analysis of content comes from tip sheets, information volunteered by members of the Romance Writers of Edmonton, and my own reading. I read several examples of every type of series; any errors in content analysis are my fault. As the chart indicates, Harlequin Presents and Romance are the most unembellished of the series; they are also the most regressive with regards to gender roles. It would be interesting to speculate how much this has to do with the fact that these novels originate mainly in England. Mills and Boon still runs a doctor/nurse series (called Medical) in the United Kingdom, which would almost certainly be perceived as an unacceptable anomaly to the North American readership. In fact, unquantified romance booksellers' reports in Romantic Times'

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[8] From the Bantam Loveswept tip sheet: "[The heroine and hero] should meet as close to page one as possible and never be apart for more than 8 to 10 manuscript pages." Harlequin gives a tip sheet for each series, covering these topics: heroine, hero, plot, sex, setting, style, length and submission format. The Silhouette one-page tip sheet issued at conferences includes blurb-style tips such as: "Believable characters swept into a world of larger-than-life romance, such is the magic of Sillhouette Intimate Moments."

"Bookstore News" column indicate that North American readers want humour and more equitable relationships (Oct. 1993, 119) in their books. "Bookstore News" writers also confirm a growing interest in the paranormal and in time-travel novels. This allows romances to grow away from the worldly, materialistic themes evident in so many Presents into a view of wealth as a more transcendant concept.

From left to right, the categories along the top of the chart indicate how many books are published per month and what year the series had their North American publication debut (Columns 1 and 2). They make clear the repeated premise that every (mainstream) romance novel must include a developing heterosexual romance (Column 3). The Alpha male (Column 4), however, is not such a necessity. As defined by Krentz, the Alpha males "are the tough, hard-edged, tormented heroes [...] feminist critics despise" ("Taming the Romance" 107-108). She is correct in that assertion. She is also correct in her assertion that most best-selling romances have Alpha male heroes. What she neglects to mention, however, is that most of the New York Times best-selling romances are single titles, not categories. The Alpha male, despite his uncompromising name, is steadily evolving along with the rest of the romance genre.

The "career" columns indicate whether or not the character has a self-generated means of support. The career does not have to be described realistically, or to be important to the plot. The difference between the heroine as detective and the heroine becoming involved in a mystery, is, as indicated grammatically, one of activity versus passivity (Columns 7 and 8). The old stereotype of the Gothic heroine awaiting her fate, passive yet terrified, is being replaced by heroine detectives, both amateur and professional; the Intrigue line publishes only romantic suspense. Humour refers both to humourous situations and to verbal humour, such as witty sparring dialogue. Bantam Loveswept relies heavily on humourous, often slapstick situations to keep a fast pace.

The paranormal is, as indicated above, enormously popular. Storylines include those with ghosts, reincarnation, psychic bonds between lovers or twins, dreams becoming reality or protagonists possessing extraordinary healing powers, among

others. (Time-travel is still rare in series romances.) Social problems commonly discussed in series romance include dealing with an abusive/irresponsible ex-spouse; dealing with a physically or mentally handicapped child, or learning to live with a handicap; dealing with adult illiteracy; dealing with juvenile delinquency, often as a result of an abusive home relationship; or dealing with the ravages of the drug trade. Column 14, women's sexual problems, refers to explicit textual mention of sexual anxieties and past sexual history problems, such as miscarriages, inability to achieve orgasm, and so on.

Manuscript lengths are those indicated on tip sheets. The final column, degree of sexuality, uses terminology found within the industry. Sweet refers to sexual activity from the breasts up. Sensual allows full coital intercourse, but in soft focus. In sensual series, lovemaking means that there is usually an understanding of incipient marriage. Sexy means that both coital intercourse and variations are permitted. Explicit physical description and details are given, all in acceptable romance code (currently, penis is becoming acceptable; erection is already so).

Having quantified series romances in such a fashion, it must be made clear that exceptions to this chart could without doubt be found within every single line listed. It must also be noted that Figure 1.1 does not take into account discrepancies in the quality of writing. The limitations of genre have to do more with content than with quality, but romance tends to demand a specific literary style.

Not included on the chart are "mini-series", such as Harlequin Crystal Creek, which feature novels written by different authors, centred around one setting, with the possibility of "interlocking" characters. Special holiday anthologies are also not included.

## Figure 1.1 Series Summary Chart (as of December, 1993)

SW-SL =Sweet -Sensual

| Publisher Category | #Books/ Month | Date Comm-enced | M/F Love Relt'n | Alpha Male | Female Career | Male Career | Female Detec-tive | Mystery | Humour | Para-normal | Social Problem | Female Sexual Problem | MS Length | Degree of Sexuality |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harlequin (Hq.) Romance | 4 | 1957 | A [1] | A | Y | A | N | N | N | N | N | N | 50-55 T | SWEET |
| Hq. Presents | 6 | 1973 | A | A | Y | A | N | N | N | N | N | N | 50-55 T | SW-SL |
| Hq. Presents Plus | 2 | 1993 | A | A | Y | A | N | N | N | N | N | N | N/A | SENS'L |
| Hq.Temptations | 4 | 1984 | A | P | A | A | N | N | P/N | P/N | N | N | 60 T | SEXY |
| Harlequin Superromance [2] | 4 | 1980 | A | N | Y | A | PN | P/N | P/N | P/N | P/Y | P/Y | 85 T | SENS'L |
| Hq. American | 4 | 1983 | A | P | A | A | P | P | Y | P | N | N | 70 T | SENS'L |
| Hq. Intrigue | 4 | 1984 | A | P | A | A | A | A | P | N | N | N | 70-75 T | SW-SL |
| Hq. Regency [3] | 2 | 1989 | A | P | N | N | N | P | P | N | N | N | 50-60 T | SWEET |
| Hq. Historical [4] | 4 | 1989 | A | P | N | N | N | P | P | N | N | N | 95-105T | SENS'L |
| Silhouette (Sil.) Romance | 6 | 1980 | A | Y | Y | A | P/N | N | P | N | N | N | 55-58 T | SWEET |
| Silhouette Special Edition [2] | 6 | 1982 | A | N | A | A | P/N | N | P | N | P/Y | P/Y | 75-80 T | SENS'L |
| Sil. Desire | 6 | 1982 | A | P/Y | A | A | P/N | N | P | P/N | N | P | 55-60 T | SEXY |
| Sil. Intimate Moments [2] | 6 | 1983 | A | N | A | A | P/Y | N | P | P/N | P/Y | P/Y | 80-85 T | SENS'L |
| Sil. Shadows | 2 | 1993 | A | P/Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | A | N | N | 70-75 T | SENS'L |
| Bantam Loveswept | 6 | 1983 | A | P | Y | A | P/N | P | A | P | N | N | 55 T | SENS'L |

Notes to Figure 1.1

1. A = absolute (in all novels; a requirement)
   Y = yes (in 75% plus of novels)
   P = possible (in 25 to 75% of novels)
   N = not likely (in less than 25% of novels)
2. It is often very difficult to distinguish between these three series; the chart reflects this. However, as always, Harlequin books contain less humour than those from other publishers.
3. Not considered a series by Romantic Times, but as a separate romance phyla, Regencies are nevertheless so uniform as to be easily gradeable. Harlequin distributes them as any other category.
4. According to Romantic Times (December 1993, 77) Harlequin Historicals will soon be increasing in length; currently they are about 300 pages, which is short for a historical, as a quick survey of thirty-five historical reviews for December 1993 reveals. However, they sell for $4.50 US; a more typical price is $4.99 US for a romance of 400 pages. The magazine does not review Harlequin Historicals as a series, but alongside other historicals. However, Harlequin does have a tipsheet for its Historicals.

It can be seen from Figure 1.1 that most romance series embrace elements from other types of fiction, such as detective novels and science fantasy writings. Series also often derive inspiration from recent popular films such as Ghost (dir. Jerry Zucker, Paramount, 1990). This "borrowing" keeps the lines from being entropic and feeling clichéd to readers. The interference of new elements being added to specific series has changed the entire nature of series romance. Series readers, it would appear, are turning to more sophisticated plot lines, which combine elements other than just the love story. One of the justifications offered by readers to critics such as Radway (107) is that the texts contain information regarding, for example, exotic locales and customs. Writers, dozens of whom write articles explaining their latest title every month in Romantic Times, feel that treatment of such themes as adult illiteracy and abusive spousal relationships makes their work both more serious and more acceptable. It certainly alters the tone of romances. Yet the suspicion must remain that there are formats more appropriate than fictional texts in which to deal with such weighty issues. In a fictional text, especially one destined for a large demographically-varied audience, the issue will most likely be presented in a way so

as to make it palatable to the largest segment of that audience, without fully exploring the topic. This is of course true of all mass media.

Harlequin may also be a victim of its success, in that reader identification, like critical identification, may run as follows: Harlequin equals Presents. Gossip has it that Intimate Moments and Special Edition both outsell Superromance. However, since both Harlequin and Silhouette are owned by TorStar, the bottom line of any competition between the two imprints is blunted. (It must be noted here that romance codes can be infectious--in Regency slang, "blunt" means money.)

Only one listed series line is not in the TorStar conglomerate; Bantam Loveswept. In fact, until July 1993, there was a small independent company called Meteor Kismet. It was bought out by Harlequin, and is now in limbo. PAN, the Published Author's Network of the Romance Writers of America, recently published a rating of all romance publishers [9]. Kismet was the highest-ranked in almost every category (e.g., contract terms, royalties, editorial helpfulness). Harlequin may be leery of possible future competition. In the early eighties, store sales dropped and returns from mail order sales were extremely high; Harlequin was not following market developments as closely as Simon and Schuster's Silhouette novels. Simon and Schuster had originally agreed to distribute Harlequin's novels in the United States, the same way Harlequin was originally a distributor for Mills and Boon. In 1981, after a contract dispute, they broke away and formed their own company, which in 1984 they sold back to Harlequin, thus giving TorStar a virtual monopoly of the market (Markert 84). Simon and Schuster signed an agreement not to market a rival product for another nine years. That agreement expires soon.

Meanwhile Harlequin is floating rumours about a "glitz and glamour" and a "Generation X" line, and is expanding into films (Mallet 23). The market is currently changing, and voracious. In fact, the original success of Presents, conceived as being "spicier" than the original Romance, was perhaps due to changes taking place in another branch of the romance world; the development of the erotic historical.

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[9] 1993 Rate the Publishers Survey. Houston: PANdora's Box, 1993.

1972 is hailed by Landers (10) as a "watershed" year. Paperback novels for women, aside from the straight Harlequin Romance series, were dominated by the Gothic (which came in for its share of feminist criticism; see Joanna Russ). Avon editor Nancy Coffey discovered a manuscript on the slush pile which seemed to herald a new, exciting kind of historical romance. The Flame and the Flower by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss contained, within a romance plot line, what were then considered explicit sexual scenes. The responses of women readers, seen in sales figures, and attested to by writers such as Susan Elizabeth Phillips (in Krentz 53) and in articles such as "How to Write Like Kathleen E. Woodiwiss" (in Falk 265-66) were overwhelmingly positive. Undoubtably the change in sexual mores accounted for by the development of reliable contraception helped give Flame and Flower its enthusiastic reception. However, the novel's opening scenes depict a rape, and the authors Avon contracted to duplicate Woodiwiss' success (Jennifer Wilde a.k.a. Tom Huff, Rosemary Rogers and Shirlee Busbee) focussed on erotic violence to such an extent that the term "bodice ripper" came into use. The early popularity of bodice rippers also fuelled many discussions of the "rape fantasy" - some critics asserting it was normal (Hazen, Morgan and Haskell), others that it was degenerate and perverse (Stoller, Louise Kaplan). By the mid-eighties the erotic historical market had gone soft (Thurston 62-64); readers no longer wanted a textual world where the heroine was denied responsibility for her sexual actions. As a result, historical heroines became more feisty; today, it is routine to find anachronistic complaints against the inequality of women's lot being voiced by historical heroines [10]. Incidentally, the erotic historical put paid to the Gothic, which was rigid in its formula (and only had one, unlike romance, which is as polymorphous as desire itself).

Within the subgenre of historical romances, I would propose a three-way division, depending on the extent and manner of factual historical research influencing the textual world. I have never seen such a classification attempted elsewhere; Thurston divides historicals according to sexual content (187), and Fallon according

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[10] This shall be seen in the study of Amanda Quick novels (Chapters Four and Five).

to the periods in which they are set. I feel that division on the basis of what amounts to the texture of the writing is both more accurate, and more fruitful for further discussion, as the style of writing influences the types of plot devices likely to be encountered, and the manner of interaction between the protagonists. The vast majority of historicals are dress historicals, where the historical setting serves two interrelated purposes, neither of which are directly related to the individual plot. On one hand, it serves to make the heightened, emotionally charged events seem less threatening, as they are removed from contemporary life. On the other hand, the commonly imagined trappings of historical settings heighten the glamour of the potentially anxiety-inducing events, which can then be presented in a more dramatic manner. "Although she now knew what a foolish plot it had been to try and spy on Tremaine by posing as a cabin boy, she would not let him see her disgust as she swabbed the decks clean of the traces of last night's horrendous fistfight" is more romantic (and appears more heroic) than "She mopped the kitchen floor clean from the stains of his nosebleed". Such incidentals as child labour and the effects of not having any sewage system at all are not mentioned in these historicals. Examples of historical dress writers would include Catherine Coulter and Johanna Lindsey.

The second type of historicals, the motivated historical, relies much more on historical fidelity for effect. The less savoury details of the period chosen are often included. Not surprisingly, such novels often have a greater degree of psychological verisimilitude. They are also often considerably longer. Perhaps one of the appeals of such novels, which have recently become much more popular (Outlander) is the post-modern fashion of reading, where seemingly extraneous details are relished not as a social commentary, and not as an encoded reference to the personality of a character, but simply as information. Ciji Ware, Joan Aitken and Diana Gabaldon all write motivated historicals.

Regency romances are, strictly speaking, motivated historicals, since detailed knowledge of the Regency era is required, but since the system of information which underlies Regencies is clearly delineated, as Robinson points out, they resemble one another as closely as categories. Yet the tone of Regencies is even more important

than details of Almack's, which can, after all, be placed into other types of historicals. Due respect for decorum, with yet a suspicion of humour lurking in the fine eyes of the heroine, and at the corners of the hero's sculpted mouth, is the defining feature of Regencies, and affects all else, including type of sexual contact, setting and background of the characters.

Both dress and motivated historicals favour certain settings and temporal periods. Anglophiles will be gratified to learn that England is the setting of choice, followed by Scotland and Wales, with Ireland also making frequent appearances, at least during the mediaeval period. It is rare, but not unheard of, to have a romance set before 1100 A.D.; likewise, mediaevals have been set in all of Western Europe. The other favoured timespan is between 1700 and 1900. Regencies, it will be noted, fit in this period. American settings rival the British in popularity, especially "frontier" romances set in the Wild West and southern romances, often set in Creole Louisiana society.

The popularity of the mediaeval period can be explained by referring to the mystique of chivalry and l'amour courtois. In fact, if the structure of courtly love depended on the supposedly insuperable barrier between a knight and his lady, as de Rougement has suggested, then its appeal for today's romance writers becomes apparent, as much of the romance plot concerns various barriers keeping the protagonists apart. The mediaeval period is given additional spice through the spectres of Druids and gyrfalcons, which complement knights and fair ladies in castles. The popularity of the modern period seems to be explained by the amount of information readily available regarding this age, especially visual images; this is the era of elegant ballroom gowns, fans, and beauty patches. Society became more ordered in this period, the levels of the nobility set. This very formality, whether imagined or not, creates a barrier of decorum for impetuous love to burst through. The American set romances are motivated by a desire to glamourise an indigenous history, as opposed to an imported European one.

The third type of historical romance is the fictionalized biography. Eleanor Burford Hibbert, under the pseudonym Jean Plaidy, was a prolific writer of glamorous

biographies of famous people, long on romantic entanglements and short on detailed economic or political manoeuverings. Obviously the writer is fairly closely bound by facts when writing such novels. They are less common and less popular than the other types of historicals.

Historical romances seem to best capture the essence of all that is entailed in the word "romance" in its widest sense. The OED entry (8: 766-7) includes the words adventure, chivalry, legend, mediaeval, extravagant and the phrases "wild or wanton exaggeration" and "the scenes and incidents are very remote from those of ordinary life". All of these descriptors can be applied to historical romances. Since not only the plot, but also the language of historicals, must create the desired ambience, there is a greater use of the highly-charged, heavily adjectival style that may be labelled "romance code". The combination of the highly encoded text with the variety of possible settings means that while historicals can embody a greater sense of romance than other sub-genres, they also allow the individual author greater room for individual creativity. Many of the current plot trends such as use of the paranormal and time-travel in series romances originated in single title historicals. (Discussion of social issues in contemporary series is rarely used to motivate the plot; it is more often used to demonstrate the integrity or lack thereof of a character.) Unrestricted by rigid series guidelines, historicals form a more fluid corpus, one that allows both for greater rapid movement of the system as a whole (witness the explosion of sexually-explicit novels in the wake of Flame and Flower), and for more experimentation. The fact that many authors do not take advantage of the opportunities presented by this sub-genre and instead appear content to write variations on their personal fabula is due not only to the fact that romance writing is a profession, but also to the fact that many authors (and readers) claim their stories speak to them on some important, personal level. Whether this identification can be qualified as a positive or a negative thing is the focus of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER TWO:

## FOR AND AGAINST: why ideological arguments are irrelevant to the appeal of the romance

Hug me till you drug me, honey;
Kiss me till I'm in a coma:
Hug me, honey, snuggly bunny;
Love's as good as soma.

Aldous Huxley

L'amour et la fumme ne se cachent pas.

Louisiana Creole proverb,
quoted by Jennifer Blake

At the beginning of the current romance boom, in the early seventies, when historical "bodice rippers" and the new, spicier Harlequin Presents were introduced to a huge audience, there were often several defining aspects to the relationship between the hero and heroine. He was older, more experienced and usually possessed great personal wealth. The heroine had docility and charm. That paradigm has changed considerably in the intervening years; heroines are now more actively heroic, often combining career goals with strongly-held personal values. Forced seduction scenes have all but disappeared from historicals. Regardless of how women actually feel about seduction fantasies, writers no longer offer them. "I think, as I believe most women do, if we're really straight with ourselves, that, instinctively, on a primal level, we want to be ravished. It's tricky politically, but [...] ravishment is not rape. It is a fine line"[1]. Regardless of how romance writers feel about political correctness:

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[1] Carol Lazare, Author's Note to "The Footpath of Pink Roses," Slow Hand: Women Writing Erotica, ed. Michele Slung, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 89.

"The effort to make romance novels respectable has been a resounding failure" (Krentz 113), it has invaded the romance.

This is not surprising, as much of the criticism directed at romances in the past has been done on an ideological level, analysing content. The reason why romance, more than any other form of genre fiction, is censured is because of the subject matter. However, romance has not just been flatly censured as a bad thing; the production and consumption of them has also been discussed as a symptom of a societal or psychological lack.

"The lady or the tiger"

There are several "schools" of objection to romances. Many of them set out to prove why romance is bad, without appreciating the fact that they are polemicising a text, making an ideological artefact, out of something created for entertainment. It is no wonder that such critics' texts bear so little resemblance to the ones read by romance readers; only Robinson has enough courage to admit liking romances, and then she only speaks of the venerable Georgette Heyer, who also wrote in the less-maligned genre of detective fiction. However, the confusion over romance may perhaps be occasioned by the genre itself. In the Critical Idiom text The Romance Gillian Beer hastens to make it clear (on the first page) that the romance as she sees it has little to do with popular "sub-literature". Nevertheless, trading on even the slight relationship that Beer allows, if the following statements are applied to the types of romances under discussion here, it may become clearer as to why such confusion is generated by the romance. "Revolution is one function of the romance" (13) and "Conservatism was always an impulse in the romance" (23) would appear to be contradictory statements. Patricia Parker, also writing about lyric (as opposed to popular) romances, states that as a form romance "simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end" (4). Indeed, she feels this is a fundamental characteristic of the genre. This contradiction is exploited by romance apologists, who claim that

despite appearances, "the subversive nature of the books is fundamental and inescapable" (Krentz 5).

What critics do agree on is the delineated difference between sets of values and qualities. The role of the heroine is to create an overlapping area in these sets. Her concession is usually physical; the hero's concession must include an attitude readjustment. Jayne Ann Krentz sees this as evidence of female subversiveness. The feminist critics form a solid phalanx against her. Janice Radway sees this as evidence of a false consciousness; romances enable women to think they are happy under patriarchy. Ann Barr Snitow interprets it as a female capitulation to a patriarchal system. Tania Modleski interprets it as a semi-castration, as a vengeance fantasy. Kay Mussell, who follows the feminist-critic mainstream of seeing romances as a result of patriarchy, adds as a consoling endnote the comment that, "despite their acquiesence to patriarchy, romances strongly reassert the belief that woman's sphere is more than merely tangential to human life" (191).

Romances are largely written by women for a female audience, and the female protagonist is a necessary character. It is a genre in which women loom very large as producers, consumers and subjects. The unrelenting current feminist attack on mass market romances, dismissing them as pablum fed to oppressed women to keep them happy in their oppression, which has been the consensus since Germaine Greer, is therefore distressing. Instead of attacking the texts, feminist critics may gain a greater understanding of them if they analysed them from a reader's perspective. Granted, there are several areas of objection to the romance on feminist ideological grounds. The "Alpha male", the hard-edged, steely-eyed hero who nonetheless is kind to animals, small children, and the elderly, is found to be repugnant. Apparently a hero who possesses a magnetic sexual attraction is a masochistic fantasy figure. The emphasis on the heroine's virginity is seen as evidence of her as a tabula rasa, waiting to be written on by the phallic penis, a tool of oppression with which the romance writer's pen is in indubitable league. The way in which sexuality is expressed, as a force so strong it sometimes is manifested in a quasi-violent manner, is seen as typical of all male interactions with oppressed females in the real world.

However, for each point of opposition feminists make against the romance, there are counter-questions raised by the writers in Krentz's anthology. The very fact that they feel such a need to be polemic, to polarise male/female and good/bad, shows how much feminists owe to "oppressive" systems of arranging information and categorising qualities. Sometimes (see Douglas and Snitow) romance is burdened with the heavy label of "pornography":

> Anti-pornography feminists have always favored a single and universal reading of sexual imagery. They have elaborated a mechanistic theory about the myriad ways in which sexually explicit materials cause enormous harm, from promoting misogynist ideas and male dominance to directly inspiring rape. Just like the moral conservatives, they reject interpretive schemes that admit the complexity and ambiguity of images, as well as the diverse responses of viewers [2].

Clearly, the responses of the romance audience must be analysed to understand the appeal of the novels. If romances are so cruel and sadistic, why do women read them? Two Ms. articles address the issue underlined by Krentz's anthology: the fact that elements deemed desirable in fantasies may not be sought out in real life. As Haskell notes, in fantasy, "helplessness is one of the conditions controlled by the fantasizer" (85). She suggests that "by envisioning and eroticizing rape we have gained a psychological ascendancy over it" (94)--a claim which many feminists may find dubious. After all, why fantasise about unpleasant things? The answer, as seen in many early bodice-rippers, is that when the fine line "between coercion and collusion" (Haskell 86) has been crossed, women can eschew any reponsibility, thereby allowing themselves "to feel wanton again and again while maintaining their sense of themselves as not that sort of woman" (Snitow 152). Unfortunately, as Béatrice Slama notes, "Les valeurs-refuge d'hier peuvent devenir les valeurs-prison de demain" (71). However, this can be applied with equal justice to both overly-strident feminist criticism and rape scenes. In fact, Ann Douglas, in one of the most unrelenting attacks on romances, defines them as pornography because she feels the

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[2] Carole S. Vance, "Feminist Fundamentalism--Women Against Images," Art In America Sept 1993: 36.

heroine is denied personhood and kept in sexual thrall. Of course, she thinks that the only acceptable view of appropriate personhood for a young female is hers. To prove her credentials, she mentions her book, The Feminization of American Culture, published by Avon, the house that originated the bodice-ripper boom in 1972, and is still one of the largest romance publishing houses. It is debatable whether a thrall knows with absolute certainty that the "master" will be brought unequivocably to his (or her) knees, but a romance reader is always secure in the ending of her story. She knows that the hero will admit the error of his ways, will make amends, will help look after the baby.

It is an indisputable fact that in the romance world, the violence of the hero's response is in direct proportion to the violence of his feelings. Physical expression of sexuality is shown as the one area where the heroine inevitably crosses over the word/action barrier. Sexual intercourse is seen as an act of unshakeable loyalty, and as such it is emblematic for many of the heroine's heroic qualities. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

In fact, much of the feminist criticism of romances which focuses on gender differences as presented in the romance world not only ignores the separation in the reader's mind between fantasy and reality, but also appears to have a strictly limited idea of what is considered acceptable sexual behaviour. As Vance stated, sexual images can be both complex and ambiguous. Many people apparently do thrive on a little aggression, even if only in fantasies [3]. Leslie Rabine notes of the Harlequin that it is the "mingling of protest and acquiescence" which makes romances "so seductive and contradictory" (256).

That romances should evoke such a paradoxical response in readers is not surprising, since romances, after all, rely heavily upon the lure of the forbidden. The lurid covers themselves contribute to the distaste often shown towards the novels; reading them in public certainly is an act of defiance (see Krentz 1). Romances

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[3] As Krentz notes in "Trying to Tame the Romance", the "aggressive seduction of the protagonist" occurs in mystery novels, thrillers, and men's action-adventure (110). Often the protagonist in these genres are male, yet there is little critical discussion of this.

supply plenty of suspense and titillation regarding dealings with the opposite sex. Danger (which eventually dissipates harmlessly) forms as much an element of titillation as does sexual tension (which resolves itself in a permanent pair-bonding).

There are some radical critics (like Louise Kaplan) who would perhaps disparage anything to do with patriarchy, including heterosexuality. All feminist critics agree that romance reading stems from a lack. While they make half-hearted overtures to the camp of psycho-analytic theory, the main cause for this lack, as they see it, is a sociological one; a fundamentally unjust, unequal society. Feminism is a normative system of values, and feminist literary criticism, when allied with concrete sociological goals, tends to focus on measurable "facts" as presented within the novel. It also passes judgement on readers, based on their supposed responses. The feminist approach completely ignores the fact that these novels are not written as a reflection of, or a moral tale about, reality. They are consciously written to appeal to fantasies which are divorced from notions of political correctness. The writers in Dangerous Men all strenuously deny that they are repressed, politically naive women, but they enjoy romances. They state repeatedly that portions of the narrative which appeal to them as romance readers do not necessarily portray events they would wish to experience in real life (e.g. Barlow 45 and Phillips 54). Fantasy life, they argue, is complementary to, but not convergent with, "real" life.

Both Ms. articles by Morgan and Haskell agree with the Krentz anthology contributors. In addition, they claim that fantasising about something may well be a means of bringing it under control. The same view is taken by immensely successful contemporary novelist Anne Rice, writing as Anne Rampling, in her sado-masochistic glitz and glamour romance Exit to Eden, who proposes the argument that sado-masochistic sexual activities between consenting adults may redirect "real life" aggressive impulses such as waging war. At the end of the novel, one character vindicates his sexual orientation, stating that he refuses "to be made to look bad, feel bad, or sound bad because of the brand of sex that I want" (303). He explains to the female protagonist: "Nothing sexual disgusted you or confused you or turned you off.

Only real violence, real hurt, the real destruction of another's body and will were your enemies" (305).

Feminists' denial of the seduction fantasy found in so many romances may perhaps be related back to what Vance labelled their "mechanistic" notion of sexuality. It confuses them, because it thwarts their ideological assumptions, and so they label it "bad". They cannot appear to take cognisance in their theories of the fact that desire is both polymorphous and an immensely powerful force. It is not uncommon, either in various media or in real life, to hear lovers state, "I love you so much I would die for you," "I love you to death," "I would give my life for yours," etc. It is highly unlikely that the lover wishes to die for the loved one; it is simply that an external indication is needed for the extravagance of the internal emotions. However, in romances, the hero or heroine often gets to brave death for the sake of their loved one. Even the ravishment myth, as Krentz and Barlow claim, can be elucidated in this manner; the heroine could settle for a hellish life with the frozen, repressed hero, but perseveres in persuading him of his ability and need to return her love; everything ends in a pastoral forever-after.

The argument of fantasy as a control mechanism is in opposition to those critics, who, following psycho-analytic theory, feel that romances are anaesthetising devices which demand repeat performances as they can never sufficiently address that which they attempt to conceal. They feel that fantasies, in effect, control the fantasiser. Both Modleski and Louise Kaplan argue along these lines.

In fact, the heroine usually is and remains precise about what she wants: loyalty, commitment, etc., all of them qualities which she (sometimes misguidedly) exemplifies herself. It tends to be the hero whose ideas and expectations undergo changes throughout the novel. The heroine does not usually demand that the hero repay for the damages men have done to women, even those he may have participated in before his conversion. She is not interested in vengeance.

This is at odds with much "feminist" writing. Novels such as The Women's Room by Marilyn French or Fay Weldon's writings are almost unremittingly pessimistic in their portrayal of relationships between the sexes; by and large, male

characters are swine. Feminist content-based analysis of romances begin from a normative world-view, which romances are then measured against and found lacking. As hinted in Chapter One, Marxist-based analyses often follow a similar path and arrive at similar conclusions. The hero, with his silences and inexplicable actions, is sadistic (and a swine), therefore the heroine, despite her struggles, is masochistic. Society, of course, is the real villain.

Feminists' world-view is not the only possible one:

> ...we both move women and their concerns to the center of the picture--but the fundamental vision of women's lives differs [...] Kay Mussell writes that romance reading provides "an escape from powerlessness, from meaninglessness, and from lack of self-esteem and identity" (Mussell's emphasis 164). I am a romance reader, and I strongly object to anyone describing my life in those terms (Seidel 174).

As she further notes, the objection of "false consciousness" is "unanswerable--as it is designed to be" (176). Feminists see romance reading as an escape from unpleasantness, not as a foray into a controlled, dangerous thrill. Many feminist voices laud Nancy Friday's collections and Lonnie Barbach's anthologies, as evidenced by the back and inside covers of their books. Apparently it is liberated to fantasise in the context of sexual fulfilment and repressed to do the same in the context of romantic fulfilment.

Actually, the romance reader knows that hero and heroine are supposed to get together; the hero does not have to prove his worth to either the reader or the heroine, but to himself. One of the advantages of closed reading is that the outcome is not only expected by the reader, but desired. The more difficulties, the more extreme situations (like a forced marriage, or an abduction) that the hero initiates for the sake of wooing the heroine, the higher he places her value. He courts her with actions, which she in turn mistrusts, demanding words.

Romances focus most intensely on a relatively short period of a woman's life, which sociologist Jessie Bernard has labelled her "prime time"; the transition between adolescent to wife. Sexual committment is fraught with danger; one must choose the right man. And yet, despite early textual appearances to the contrary, the romance

heroine does just that. She manages to overcome obstacles on both sides (this is vitally important in current romances), and her choice is vindicated. Perhaps this serves to reassure the reader, not that she can control men with sex, but that she can or has or will make the right choice. The hero must understand the heroine's sexuality, and never be disgusted or threatened by it. Sexuality in the romance world is not something to be explored with self-love manuals, or with anonymous strangers, but something to be explored with a permanent partner. Once a woman is a mother, men are no longer as essential (Barlow 51). Novels dealing with such a period in a woman's life would of course be interesting, but they would not be romances.

As for the "constructive resolution of the central conflict (also known as the much-maligned happy ending)" (Lowell in Krentz 90), which romance readers can confidently expect, Roberta Gellis has commented: "Romance novels today show change better than serious literary novels, which concentrate on discontent...[They] don't show the change in aspirations, the hope" (qtd in Thurston 166). In much "serious" writing, there does not appear to be room for both political correctness and optimism in the same text. Even the literary critic Ann Rosalind Jones is driven to ask: "What's wrong with a happy ending?" (qtd in Radford 215).

However, both feminist and romance writings dichotomise. In the feminist world view, there is a gulf between males and females; in romance, that same gulf exists, as seen by the word/action split. In neither is it bridged, except at the very end of romance novels. Feminist novels posit most women as oppressed, and some women as aware of the fact. Blissful housewives become the Other. Radway, for example, who clearly sees romance readers as "Other" than her, claims that the reader enjoys romances because they recreate not just courtship "but what it feels like to be the object of one" (Radway's emphasis 64). In other words, the romance reader is passive, as opposed to the active feminist critic. Both her vision of whom romance readers identify with in the text, and her view of the characters themselves, are contested by critics in the Krentz anthology.

"Fear and loathing in the critical canon"

The sociologist Jessie Bernard, in The Female World, agrees with the dichotomy proposed in many romance novels: that there is a female world, governed by Gemeinschaft, which is kin-and-locale based, governed by a love or duty ethos, and a male one, Gesellschaft, which is contract-based (27-8). She believes that women know the systems governing the male world, but that males are ignorant of the systems governing the female one. She specifically states that men define intimacy physically, while women do so verbally (391, ftn. 11).

It seems slightly paradoxical, after spending several hundred pages elucidating the differences in the female and male worlds, that Bernard believes a rapprochement can occur. Unlike the romance novels, she does not suggest the means or methods to effect this. Of course, the solutions proposed by romance novels-- get a good job which you have a great deal of control over, find a good man who will prize you and understand you--are simplistic, and operate only on the personal level. Nevertheless the suspicion cannot be escaped that at least part of the critical hostility is due not to the message, but to the audience reception, the amazing popularity of romance despite societal and critical scorn. Popular culture is beyond the control of the literary establishment; to make it worse, recent avant-garde artists have borrowed from popular culture (Eco, Open Work, 215). Even if they reformulate stylemes, movements such as Pop Art point out the ubiquitousness and the lure of popular culture.

One of the factors consistently mentioned, but not explored, by the critics mentioned above, is the role that reader identification plays in the appeal of the romance. Jauss cites Adorno as claiming that only a philistine reads in order to identify with a character in the textual world; instead, reading should be undertaken in the spirit of detached aesthetic reflectiveness (284-5). This appears to be an attempt to make the study of literature "scientific" and quantifiable, something to be approached in the same spirit as dissecting a frog. Happily, Jauss disagrees, stating that it is through identification that the aesthetic object becomes transformed into a

symbolic or communicative action (285). Emotional reactions, or identifications, cannot, unlike a frog's organs, be neatly predicted or absolutely categorised. This element of uncertainty, linked as it is with popular culture's, and in this case, romance's undeniable appeal, masquerades as revulsion but perhaps is motivated by something closer to fear in many critics' denial of popular literature.

In his collection of some of the best speculative fiction stories of the 1980s, Orson Scott Card argues that elitism is a disease of the academic-literary establishment. Accessible texts, he argues, are not taught simply because "'I have nothing to say about it'" (286). In other words, if a text needs mediation, this means the professor has a role to play; if a text does not need mediation, the professor has no meaningful role and therefore finds it much more convenient to ignore such texts. To be "learned" often seems to imply preference for the sophisticated, complex text whose meaning is only vouchsafed to the elite few. (This may be comforting to the few, but it would perhaps astonish them to be aware of how many of the masses are blissfully unaware of the stigma of their inferior taste.) The result is that students often gain the impression that only difficult texts are worth reading and worth emulating. Conversely, if they do not enjoy struggling with each "great" text they read, it emphasises the gap between high and low culture. Card proposes Gone with the Wind as the "great American novel of the twentieth century" (286), adding that it has had a greater readership (composed solely of "volunteers", that is voluntary readers) than Faulkner, and has been an enjoyed, treasured reading experience to many generations.

He also addresses the question, running like a leitmotif through this chapter, of subversiveness:

> even after the passage of several generations, the stories can still be received without mediation. In that sense they are subversive--if these stories were recognized as literature, then we would discover that we did not need professors of literature to teach us how to read. In fact, we would begin to wonder if some of the unreadable books were really so great after all [...] Yet today's academic-literary establishment teaches young writers that the goal of fiction writing is to be admired [...] by critics and professors of the establishment (287).

Card then states his belief that writing in an "avant-garde" manner is in itself conformity. Certainly if a defining feature of kitsch is its pretentiousness, as Eco states (Open Work 185), then much avant-garde work is profoundly kitsch.

Romance apologists such as Krentz and Barlow claim that readers of romance are being subversive because in romance the woman prevails. While this seems to be incompatible with the view of feminists regarding the role of women under patriarchy, as Béatrice Slama notes, "La marginalité est subversive. La marginalisation ne l'est pas" (71). This is perhaps why writers such as Krentz and Seidel highlight their formal education before asking, "Are we really a bunch of silly, incompetent, unoriginal writers, or are we thumbing our noses at the literary establishment while continuing to use the sort of diction that [...] works best in our genre?" (Krentz and Barlow 28). They note that romances are written in a manner which emphasises telling over showing.

Krentz and Barlow pose an uncomfortable question: why is showing considered by the literary establishment to be superior to telling, when romance readers enjoy detailed descriptions of characters' inner turmoils? Their question, which they leave unanswered (is it just the spectre of Modernism dwarfing all that has come before and since?) relates to the structuring of scenes in a romance novel. Diegesis figures prominently in romance texts, especially in "sequel" scenes where the protagonists, in a type of narrative soliloquy, ponder on the possible present significance and future ramifications of past events. This is reminiscent of what Patricia Parker calls "dilation", where the text "simultaneously moves towards and delays a definitive resolution or presence" (14). These sequels, or dilations of the narrative, occur after every few action-packed scenes (or even after every scene, in earlier works). It is in sequels that the heroine relives the anguish and ecstasy of the first kiss, and wonders what the hero really intends. The prose may be purple, but the intent is to heighten the emotional impact on the reader of the preceeding actions.

In the same manner, as Edmund Burke Feldman demonstrates in his theory of art education [4], a child asked to produce a drawing of a pregnant cow will picture, not a cow with a swollen belly, but a cow with the baby visible inside her. The child does not distinguish between concepts and percepts (what she knows vs. what she sees). The fact that this is perceived as child-like or primitive is due to the projection of certain cognitive processes as "correct"; yet what the child draws, showing the baby cow inside the mother's belly is what she knows to be true; to her it is correct. All drawing, even the most "realistic" representation of a pregnant cow, is in some measure abstract. So, to return to the original question, why is showing better than telling? In this case, a criticism of one aspect of romance appears to be generated by a lack of understanding of its function.

Romance code, Krentz and Barlow claim, increases the reader's "feelings of connection to other women who share her most intimate thoughts, dreams and fantasies" (p.27). Both Robin Morgan, in her Ms. article on masochistic fantasies, and Krentz, in her Introduction, name two of the same myths: those of Persephone and Atalanta. This appears paradoxical; if a woman's deepest fantasies can be shared to such a degree, does that mean fantasies all more or less follow the same pattern?

"He's my thing"[5]

Psycho-analysts would believe so, and their line of investigation becomes as normative as the doctrinaire feminists, who assume without question that all about patriarchy is bad, that it is directly opposed to feminine values, and that these values can not only be defined, but assigned without qualm to all women.

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[4] Edmund Burke Feldman, Becoming Human Through Art: Aesthetic Experience in the School (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 24-25. Incidentally, Feldman also agrees with Card that the emphasis on scholarship can often unintentionally alienate the individual from attaining a "meaningful communion" with art (28).

[5] A quote from another hugely successful aspect of commercial culture: "alternative" music. Lyrics run in part: "He's my thing/Stay away from my thing/Get yer own thang/He's my thing I kept for myself and nobody else." (Babes in Toyland. "He's My Thing." Painkillers. Reprise, CDW 45339, 1993.) This tongue-in-cheek men-as-object theme nevertheless recalls what many of Radway's readers told her when they claimed, at several points in the text, that romance reading was something they did just for themselves. And referring back to Eco's comments concerning the mingling of popular and high art, Babes in Toyland use critically-acclaimed photographer Cindy Sherman's images on their album covers. Clearly the generative impulses behind cultural artefacts break across media, generation and high vs. low lines.

Angela Carter (who informs the reader with relish that "of all the great novels in the world, Jane Eyre veers the closest towards trash" (Expletives Deleted 162), a statement which makes this reader, at least, question just how Carter felt about "trash" fiction) states that "The archaic sub-literary forms of romance and the fairytale are so close to dreaming that they lend themselves readily to psychoanalytic interpretation". Romance writers claim that their texts are not sub-literary, but written in a specific code. They might be different, but they will not be passively marginalised. As Lacan stated, "L'inconscient est ce chapître de mon histoire qui est marqué par un blanc ou occupé par un mensonge" (259). Feminists feel that romances are a "mensonge"; those who have reviewed the history of the genre and found it lacking (Rachael Anderson), find it is a "blanc". Psycho-analytic critics do try and find out the truth behind the blank, but they apply their theories only to the reader; not to the text. In fact, Lacan suggests five categories in which to try and find the truth: "monuments" such as hysterical manifestations; archival documents, such as childhood memories; semantic evolution, including a personal language; traditions, which he defines as "les légendes qui sous une forme héroïsée véhiculent [mon] histoire" (259); and finally, traces of distortions. Certainly, the last three categories can be explored with regard to romances, and will be discussed later.

Louise Kaplan dichotomises the world, but not along the same lines as Jessie Bernard; instead she divides according to a slave/master mentality. And in romances, she finds a reaffirmation of the "familiar patriarchal logos: every slave longs for a master; every bottom needs a top and a good top is hard to find" (334). She does not see the hero and heroine as bonding in a meaningful way; instead, she sees a sterile bondage relationship, with a mutually dependant master and slave. She claims that the consumer of pornography (and to her, romance novels are female versions of male pornography) identifies both with the top and the bottom, a claim reminiscent of Krentz and Barlow who feel that in romance sex scenes, the reader identifies with hero and heroine. The implications of Kaplan's accusations, some of which are proved true, will be discussed in Chapter Three. However, unlike feminist literary critics, and unlike romance apologists, she does not see desire as a symbol of a

mature human being; for her desire is always infantile and regressive, basic scenarios relevant to the individual being played out over and over. It is doubtful whether Kaplan would feel that anyone has a "normal" sexuality.

Jessica Benjamin's The Bonds of Love also deals with the problem of gender differentiation and dominance. Benjamin, like Kaplan, refers to the work of Robert Stoller, who upholds a theory of individuation that rewrites Freud in a whole new way. Feminist critics such as Judith Kegan Gardiner also refer to this theory, only they attribute it to Nancy Chodorow, in her book The Reproduction of Mothering. Regardless of correct attribution, the theory is that, since throughout the world children are raised by mothers, children all originally identify with the mother. The young male child, when he begins to recognise his difference, cannot formulate the theory "different but equal" (many adults, for example racists, are also incapable of this formulation). Therefore male identity emphasises difference over sharing, and also focusses on separation and self-sufficiency (76-7). As no critic comes up with a name for this theory, I will refer to it as the "femmelette and families" theory of development, in homage, of course, to Lacan's "hommelette". Benjamin elaborates that "the repudiated maternal body persists as the object to be done to and violated" (77). As the male roles develop, the female roles complement them; therefore the image of the ideal, self-effacing mother evolves. Benjamin makes explicit what the feminists call gender roles, and what she, less tied to a biological absolute, calls the "dialectic of control" (53):

> If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist [...] A condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other [...] Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition (53).

Using Histoire d'O as her prime text, she analyses the self/other or master/slave roles in a relationship. Much of what she says elucidates critical reactions to the ambivalent hero/heroine relationship in the romance, in that she talks, like Douglas, of the "violent rupture of the self" (61) through pain, which she says can be eroticised only when it involves submission to an idealised figure. Benjamin,

who believes that two separate people can form a satisfactory and reasonably egalitarian pair-bond, differentiates between identificatory love and ideal love. The first entails the desire to be like someone else (106); in the second type of love, the person seeks to find in the other an ideal image of herself (i.e., as strong and powerful). Ideal love features in most romances:

> the rationally controlling and sadistic other is wonderful by virtue of his ability to withstand destruction. In the most common fantasy of ideal love, the one so frequently found in mass-market romances, a woman can only unleash her desire in the hands of a man whom she imagines to be more powerful, who does not depend on her for his strength. Such a man, who desires but does not need her, satisfies the element missing from both mother and father, the ability to survive attack and still be there. In this sense the ideal lover actually provides a dual solution, containment and excitement, the holding environment and the road to freedom (120).

It would seem that there are always at least two options open to the reader in any romance sex scene.

Michèle Roberts offers a slightly different solution; the hero, she claims, is not a man at all; he is the (M)other, a figure that the patriarchal culture abolishes:

> I don't believe that little girls can get proper mothering in a world that is based on the power and status of fathers. Reading a novel compensates for two losses, two griefs: the loss of the actual breast that every baby has regularly to experience; and the loss of the nurturing mother that little girls in particular experience (228).

Unfortunately, Roberts returns to the feminist biological model, irrevocably labelling nurturing, supportive love as a maternal trait. She also ignores the fact that in romance novels, not only do the heroines "mother" the heroes just as often as the heroes offer them protective love, but they also often become mothers themselves. Do readers then hope to literally reinvent themselves, become their own mothers? It is to be suspected that nothing would be more horrifying for many women.

"She's in love with the man that she
Always wanted to be" [6]

Feminist romance critics find the hero's silences in the text proof of the unbridgeable gap between the male and female worlds. That is the meaning, they, as readers, impose upon them. Psycho-analytic critics read romances to find the hidden scenario being re-enacted, and find that romances allay separation anxiety; that they are therefore regressive. Again, they are reading these texts with a specific view in mind. All the critics assume, without actively exploring the issue, that the romance reader identifies with the text. This pervasive concept is left vague in critical texts specifically addressing romance. In a theoretical article, Iser elaborates:

> What is normally meant by "identification" is the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself--a familiar ground on which we are able to experience the unfamiliar. The author's aim, though, is to convey an experience, and above all, an attitude towards that experience (296).

Bettinotti et al. believe that for women, literature is situated "à l'interieur d'une quadruple conjonction: auteure, héroïne, lectrice et vision du monde partagée" (105). This is interesting in that it confirms the thesis that there can be a "vision du monde" shared between author and reader, with the protagonists acting as a "ground" against which affinities can be established. In romance, there are always two protagonists, the heroine and the hero. If the reader identifies with both of them, how will this affect her view of the dynamics of the developing relationship? In many romances, there is a quadruple structuring of "types" of characters, combining two possible polarities which generate much of the action in a paradigmatic romance text. It becomes increasingly clear that romance demands a specific style of reading.

Judith Kegan Gardiner offers a proposal which joins reader-response criticism, psycho-analytic theory, feminist theory and can be related to what romance writers

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[6] Brenda Kahn. "She's in Love." Epiphany in Brooklyn. Chaos, OK 52768, 1992. Does the use of the word "that" indicate a lack of respect for the phallic logos of grammatical language, or is it hinting again that men are also objects in a society which objectifies women, a corollary of Louise Kaplan's thesis that the master and slave become one?

say of their own genre. She proposes a specifically female mode of reading. Drawing on the "femmelette and families" theory of development, the one that states that women form their identity as a result of their interactions with others, not as a result of their independence, Gardiner states that "female identity is a process" (179). Then, turning to literary creation, she claims that "the hero is her author's daughter" (179). She believes that:

> The maternal metaphor of female authorship clarifies the woman writer's distinctive engagement with her characters and indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character. We thus return to women's "personal" closeness to literature from a new perspective (179).

She appears to be making two debatable assumptions: first, that only women read in an identificatory manner, and second, that women readers identify with women characters; however, her theory confirms suspicions that on the whole, women may read less to experience an objective aesthetic experience, and more to share experiences with a character. This may help explain (in conjunction with social factors, such as organised sport) why women read more than men. However, Gardiner, like Radway, believes that the reader identifies with the heroine. Romance critics would disagree. Kinsale thinks the hero is the focus of the reader's identification, while Barlow and Krentz feel that both heroine and hero must be accessible to the reader. Certainly identification with the hero would render his actions explicable, and would increase the efficacy of the emotional and sexual scenes. Clearly, this would indicate that reading a romance is not a detached aesthetic experience. What is the "method" of romance reading, and is it possible to schematise an "average" romance reader, to guess at her "core identity theme"?

Iser states that textual worlds without contradictions, those which exclude all elements that might shatter the illusions built up in the text, are generally not considered literary (289). If this is the case, then the successful romance text, in which the reader's illusions must be sustained (her initial assumptions regarding the outcome of the central conflict ratified) yet which more often than not contains a strong illusion-breaking episode such as abduction or other practices stemming from

an unequal division of power between genders, must embody a remarkably tough myth, or illusion, or fantasy. Of course, it must be decided as to whether or not a text can embody fantasies or whether it can only trigger fantasies in those readers who already, at some level of consciousness, have those fantasies attributed to the text. Likewise, it must be suspected that relation of the romance fabula to the Persephone myth would be made in the reader's mind only if it were placed there by critical discourse. To some people, a ravishment scenario would only make them reflect on the glamourisation of practices of gender inequality. They would have difficulty identifying either with a heroine who enjoys the scene or with the hero who carries it out (or vice versa, as absolute gender roles, but not the sense of diametrically-opposed protagonists, fade in romance).

One's preconceived notions, or existing desires, delineate the possible interpretations of the message received. As Mieke Bal pointed out, "the reception of art precedes, generates, and confines its production" (40). Clearly romance readers are not overly concerned about political correctness, so such issues are irrelevant to the romance. If fantasies are used as a device to gain some ascendancy over, or to sublimate non-normative (otherwise unacceptable) desires, how does the romance fantasy work? In one word, identification.

On a basic level, the romance reader is defined by her genre. As Rimmon-Kenan elucidates, in genre fiction, the conventions establish a contract between the text and the reader, in which the horizon of expectations becomes limited, and elements which would appear strange in other contexts are welcomed (after Culler, 125). Such is the case, for example, in (positively-received) forced seduction scenes, which would be out of place in a feminist novel.

The romance reader knows the end of the text. She can foreshorten all untoward events in the text in her need to affect closure. All must be forgiven in order for a happy ending to occur, so all will be forgiven. Gender dynamics as presented in the body of the text will be dissolved at the end of the text, once the hero becomes assimilated to the female world view. In the romance, the effect is a given; it is the process, or how the text arrives at a happy ending from an

unpromising beginning, that most concerns readers. Delays and gaps, as in all narrative fiction, are used in the romance to keep the reader reading. Reciprocal love at first sight would make for a terribly short, or a terribly introspective, book.

The various elements of the story--the plot--is used as a means to allow the reader to more fully explore the textual world, as experienced by the protagonists. It must be clarified that the focalising character is not necessarily the character with whom the reader is identifying. During scenes of dilation, which are reflective and completely diegetic, the identification should be with the focalising character, but that is not the case in action scenes. Because romances rely for their impact on engaging readers' emotions, the first thing every beginning romance writer is told is to have a strong conflict between heroine and hero motivating the plot [7]. The ideal romance would have the reader identifying with whoever has the greatest need for or interest in resolving the conflict at that time.

This can be demonstrated by concrete examples from a romance text which usurps the Scarlet Pimpernel plot line, although it is set in the Restoration South. In Southern Rapture by Jennifer Blake, the reader knows from the beginning of the double life led by the hero Ransom: he is the anonymous night rider called the Thorn, and also masquerades as the brain-damaged Ranny, nominal owner of the plantation where the heroine is staying. The heroine has dealings with both men, but does not connect them until after she inadvertently betrays Ranny's secret. In this text, whenever the hero is the focaliser, the name Ransom is used; when the heroine is the focaliser, it is either Ranny or the Thorn. The first example is that of a dilation of the text following upon a scene where a man has just been discovered brutally murdered; the Thorn is a suspect.

> Lettie was trembling. Ransom could feel it in her tight grip upon his hand. He was afraid for her, afraid as he had never been in his life. It was peculiar to be forced to sit and listen with scant intervention while his fate was decided, but he could summon little interest [...] He would give all he

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[7] For example, at the Alberta Romance Writers' Association conference Rendezvous '92 (Calgary, Alberta, May 15 to 17, 1992) author Naomi Horton gave a presentation entitled "Making Them Tick: Motivation and Conflict", which made precisely this point.

> owned, all he was or ever hoped to be, to know what she was thinking, what she felt, what her trembling meant.
>
> Weak. She had been morally, mentally, physically weak (256).

This demonstrates the conflict between hero and heroine (his secret identity, the lack of knowledge of which does not allow her to trust the Thorn; her Victorian fear of her "degenerate" nature), how misunderstandings can generate the plot (Lettie's anguish over her "weakness" leads her to entrap the Thorn), how both heroine and hero are used as focalisers, and the way a romance reader will likely react to both characters' problems, as she has insight into both of them.

However, the reader, partly due to her superior knowledge, which exceeds that of either protagonist, does not only identify with the hero as Ransom; she can also identify with him when he is being focalised, by Lettie, as Ranny. After a traumatic action scene in which Lettie meets the Thorn, she is teaching Ranny to read.

> She held the book in her lap, turning the pages with one hand while the other rested on the arm of her chair. She had read only a few paragraphs when Ranny reached to touch the back of her fingers with one hand. He smoothed the fine skin at the bend of her knuckles, then traced the almond shape of her nails. He turned her hand palm-up, following the lines that crossed it with one finger before branching off to investigate the blue veins that pulsed in her wrist (93).

The reader is not identifying with Lettie, and discovering "her" own hand; rather she is discovering, like Ransom, the hand of the loved one. If the passage had read, for example, "She felt a strange tingle of excitement as his finger traced the lines on her palm," then reader identification would have been with the focalising character Lettie. As it stands, even though his thoughts and the tactile sensations he is receiving have to be implied, the reader is feeling with Ransom. This is not, it must be noted, passive reading, where the reader simply accepts the view of the focalising character. It is active reading, and relies for its effect on the reader's knowledge of this specific text and of romance texts in general.

Radway and other critics who assume that the romance reader passively identifies with the heroine are mistaken. As Thurston noted, using the hero as the

focalising character has become more and more common; in fact, Alberta author Judith Duncan's Silhouette Special Edition A Risk Worth Taking [8] features the hero's point of view exclusively in the first half of the novel, while the second half is told exclusively from the heroine's point of view. It is typical, but not, as demonstrated above, always the case for the reader to identify with the focalising character. In love scenes, it is becoming the rule to find a shifting point of view, alternating between the heroine and hero.

It is important to have the reader identify with both protagonists, not only so that the central conflict can be viewed in a more sympathetic light, but also because the hero is a fantasy figure, not just as an object to be attained, but as a subject in his own right. Romance readers may wish "to be virgins again. To be career women. To be debutantes. To be princesses. To live in luxury..." (qtd in Krentz 156), or they may wish to be mountain climbers or wise women or senators, providing of course that the mountain-climbing senator who has six children whom she home schools is a loveable person, attested to by the devotion of the hero. And the hero is vitally important because, as Linda Barlow claims:

> The romantic hero is not the feminine ideal of what a man should be. The romantic hero, in fact, is not a man at all. He is a split-off portion of the heroine's own psyche which will be reintegrated at the end of the book [...] he is her shadow--the dark side of herself that she denies and projects outward. It has been argued that psychological integration depends on encountering the shadow and accepting it. If the romance novel teaches a woman to love anybody, the person she must learn to love is herself (49).

Surely the process of accepting one's shadow, all the nasty parts that may include a "degenerate" nature, is not a passive process. Romance apologists point out that the angry, hurt hero, who keeps his love inside, is liberated by the heroine. She helps the hero "get in touch with his emotions", as Krentz and Barlow state in their decoded version of romance back-cover copy (25). In other words, she accepts his barrenness

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[8] Silhouette Intimate Moments 400 (Sept 1991). Intimate Moments is presently launching a mini-series of Duncan's work, collectively entitled Wide Open Spaces, which features southern Alberta settings. (Duncan lives in Calgary.) I offer this information to counter the assertion of one academic, who, at a presentation I made on romance, insisted that Harlequin/Silhouette, despite Canadian ownership, actively discriminate against Canadian writers. No romance writer I have ever met indicated that place of residence made any difference whatsoever.

into her psyche, and thus releases the lock on his own psyche. The question must now be answered as to whether or not such a Jungian vision is encoded in the text, or whether it is imposed by a clever romance advocate. And if it does exist in the text, is this message likely to be decoded by a reader? Only a close examination of romance code and texture can reveal the answer.

Berg cites Jauss as defining four fundamental characteristics of an aesthetic experience such as reading. The first is that the text allows the reader to discover the actual world anew. The second is that (through identification?) the reader can relive buried experiences. It can also provide a source of identity, allowing the reader to narrate herself. And finally, reading satisfies a need for play (262-3). The second and third aspects have already been discussed above. However, the first and fourth elements can also be important in the romance reading experience. In fact, reading in any genre has ludic elements, simply because there are rules to be internalised. In romance, the very language demands that the text be approached as not-real, as a game. In many motivated historicals in particular, it is necessary to recreate the "actuality" of the temporal setting in some detail. This often provides the reader with information that serves no "useful" purpose (i.e., what eighteenth-century Scots put in bad luck charms), but which is assimilated simply for the purpose of knowing. Such self-justifying information is found less often in series romance, or in dress historicals. The very early Harlequin Presents claimed inside the front cover that they were "beautiful love stor[ies]--inordinately interesting, intriguingly informative, excitingly entertaining [...] Harlequin books take you to exciting, faraway places" (inside Harlequin Presents 6, Violet Winspear, The Honey is Bitter (1967; May 1973)). In this novel the heroine, while in Greece, samples the native cuisine with a meal of grilled chops, chips (french fries) and brussels sprouts (57). For approximately one year, circa 1983, Harlequin books featured a "Plus" at the end. One Harlequin American reader told me that the heroine's favourite recipe was always included. In Penny Jordan's Phantom Marriage (Harlequin Presents 591, May 1983), the heroine reads Shakespeare. To demonstrate the moving love poetry of the bard, a sonnet is reprinted at the back of the text. Obviously this "Plus" is a means of

legitimising both the text (Jordan and Shakespeare both write of love) and of the process of reading it; Harlequins are informative. The chosen sonnet is "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun."

Contemporary mainstreams positively revel in "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous". They regularly include fabulous settings, exclusive wining and dining, and haute couture clothing as a focus of textual descriptions. They contrast with "social issues" romances, such as Harlequin Superromance, which frequently stress a return to "down home" values, and a reassessment of what is really important in the protagonists' lives.

There are many reasons why women read romance. It may be that the central myth posited by Krentz as the success of Persephone, of being swept away and still succeeding in the end in both merging an identity with another, formerly discrete individual and in strengthening one's own identity in the process, is one that has great subconscious import for many women. This theory relates to the "femmelettes and families" theory of female development. It also ties in with the idea of the hero as mother, although the early emphasis on an older, richer, wiser hero who would take care of the sweet young thin(g) heroine has undergone quite a metamorphosis. Today, it is more likely that the heroine is also the hero's "mother" (in the sense of a nurturing mentor), teaching him the Gemeinschaft values, that is, how to bond, to form a fluid identity that defines itself in terms of her world, not just in terms of himself (an isolated, singular figure who is not-female). This sense of both nurturing and being nurtured may be comforting to some readers, and would explain the repetitive reading, which could therefore be interpreted in the category of Lacan's "hysterical manifestations".

If repetitive reading bears any functional resemblance to repetitive structuring in fiction, then perhaps the effect of reading many narratives similar in structure and texture is to increase or heighten the effect, as the texts form an accumulated "memory" in the reader, so that the "characteristic selection process" forms a more definite pattern. In other words, the more novels labelled romances are read, the more easily the reader will be able to identify "romance" stylemes in the text and

functions in the plot, as well as to identify with them. This heightening of effect can be seen in such (non-romance) texts as Marguerite Duras's Moderato Cantabile, and has been labelled "not so much a passive way of seeing the world, but...'anti-aggressive'" [9]. It therefore works within individual texts as well as for the genre as a whole, and at every stage of the "confrontation polémique" each small increment of the protagonists' rapprochement takes on a tremendous importance. The romance myth is undoubtably comforting, ending as it does on a positive note, with a desired harmony achieved.

However, in order for this theory to be tenable, it must also be demonstrated that the romance readers, being initiated into both the surface and deep structures codes of the romance, identify with the hero and the heroine. It is essential that the romance reader does identify with both main characters, but not necessarily so that an unconsciously-longed for sense of nurturance can be re(dis)covered. Rather, this makes sense of the actions of the text, as the reader can see both protagonists being motivated and repressed.

Romances may also be read for the sexual excitement they generate. In some texts, this appears to be the primary focus, and the plot accordingly strings together sex scenes, which is one way of increasing reader involvement. In other romances, physical contact may be minimal. Obviously, readers who seek this kind of gratification will choose romances that meet their demands.

Equally, it may be the lure of the exotic, whether in lifestyles, settings or temporal dislocation, that entices readers. Other readers may prefer the safety net in operation, the "much-maligned happy ending". This implies that, whatever the dangers faced by the protagonists, everything will end up happily. Many romances have an action-packed climactic movement before the final happy scene, in which the loose ends of villainy are neatly disposed of. This way, the reader can experience the thrill of danger, and achieve catharsis with a smile.

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[9] Molly Haskell, "You saw nothing in Indochina." Film Comment 29:1 Jan/Feb 1993: 33.

However, what all of these reasons depend upon is the idea that readers identify with the text; that there is a strong emotional involvement, that the protagonists must ultimately fulfill, not baffle, the reader's original horizon of expectations. For example, one of the expectations that a romance reader has is that no matter how contrary appearances may be, the hero will come through at the end, and admit his love for, and co-dependence upon, the heroine (or vice versa; the qualities of Gemeinschaft vs Gesellschaft, presented as opposites in the romance, are not irrefutably tied to gender). If this does not happen, and the hero (or heroine) turns out to be a misanthropic sadist, the reader will not find this romance satisfying.

Therefore there is no one reason why romance readers are drawn to romance, but they are all reading in an identificatory, non-cynical (ludic) manner. It furthers reader-heroine identification that the reader can trust the same indications that the heroine (often unconsciously) trusts, regarding the "real" nature of the hero. In this sense, the reader functions as the super-ego of the heroine, since she is always in a position of dramatic irony. This helps the catharsis which readers may be expected to feel when, despite all odds, everything does work out. It also highlights the absurdity of the claim that the poor anaesthetised secretary of a romance reader, imprisoned in a false consciousness, is unable to separate reality from her texts. The reader has full confidence in the textual clues because she knows the rules of the text; that these clues will come to fruition. The heroine, on the other hand, is not certain about the correct interpretation of these clues because she is only a part of the text, and cannot therefore see outside of it, or extend her consciousness of her situation by comparing it to situations in novels, unless the author explicitly states that the heroine reads romances, and believes in them. This is the case, for example in Amanda Quick's Scandal. In this novel, the heroine Emily has "sweet, romantical notions" (145) and insists, despite his claims to the contrary, that her husband Simon is a heroic and loving man. Simon is so confounded by her persistence in her beliefs that he finds himself conforming to her expectations. Simon's inner belief that he is a cold, calculating man, even though this is belied by his actions, may confuse the reader, as

it is not typical of a romance; usually the hero appearing "bad" has to struggle to suppress his conscience. Likewise, it may be that even the hero is not aware of his capacity to do good. This is demonstrated by Mr Beaumaris, in Georgette Heyer's Arabella: here, only the reader knows, which gives the reader the opportunity of out-knowing both characters she is identifying with. This may make the reader feel clever; certainly Heyer's novels read as "clever". Due to the explicit horizon of expectations generated by previous romances read, the reader has a sense of certainty about the end that allows, in effect, the end to justify the means.

In other words, the text is read as a palindrome, both forwards and backwards. A romance reader is like the whodunit reader who always reads the end first to see if she "can figure it out" as she goes along; the difference is that except in case of romantic intrigue, the romance reader is spared the ignominity of being seen furtively peering at the last pages of the text.

Regarding the reading patterns of the romance readers, because the reasons why romances are read vary, so do the acceptable answers encoded by the text. Even though the process is considered the most important element in a romance text, if the desired ending is given, and if the reader can identify with the protagonists, then her remembrance of certain texts may be of them as being romances, even though the initial reading experiences did not conform to the romance reading experience. There are romantic Bildungsromans, such as Meridon by Phillipa Gregory, or Great Maria by Cecilia Holland, novels that were perhaps not intended to fill the romance niche, but which can still have satisfactory closure forced on them by readers. For example, even though the "hero", the man with whom Meridon bonds, does not appear until over halfway through the text, many of the "markers" surrounding his appearance are also found in romances. The dialectic of their relationship, based as it is on a "confrontation polémique", is typical of romances. And the rather picaresque nature of the heroine's adventures, in which some episodes appear to have no consequence for the remainder of the narrative, is again typical of the romance trait of packing in as much excitement, of as many different kinds as possible, into the text. Most importantly, the text ends with a successful pair-bonding.

If a novel does promise romance, and then breaks that implicit contract between reader and text at the end, the determined romance reader can ignore it. As Doreen Owens Malek comments in the Krentz anthology regarding Gone with the Wind:

> ...don't quibble about the ending. Scarlett has already won several times in the book, most notably when Rhett asked her to marry him after trailing all over the old South. I was always sure they would get together again about a week after Rhett walked off into the mist, anyway (79).

Once the reader has been assured by the text that the contract holds true, she will read in a manner to uphold her original assumptions. It seems that nothing, not ravishment, or husbands not giving damns, or polemical struggles can keep the reader from finding romances to be happy, uplifting works. The reader persists in enjoying romances despite critical adversity, and despite adversity within the texts. Obviously she does not interpret the textual struggles in a negative way; she appears to like them; editors always stress the importance of a good central conflict. What is the appeal?

"Eat the peach (words so sad)"

My thinking on the topic of romance's apparently perverse popularity was clarified by several articles I read in magazines dealing with another branch of the "culture industry", alternative music. Alternative music is popular music that chooses to be marginal with regards to the Top 40 paradigm. It is a huge, polymorphous realm, even more varied than the romance, but one thing puzzles music critics: the vast and enduring popularity of so many gloom-and-doomers. Leonard Cohen belongs to another generation (although he has influenced this one) but artists such as Morrissey and Robert Smith have picked up the (unlit, dying) torch. Many critics find their work plainly offensive; to quote one of Morrissey's lyrics, "How can

someone so young/Sing words so sad?" [10]. The real question is of course, how can someone (so young, or any age) sing words so sad, and sell so many records doing it. Angst is a word much bandied about by the puzzled critics, and "Robert Smith never grew up," one charges. This charge sounds more than vaguely familiar to the reader of critical works directed against romance. They're not elemental, or rewriting basic myths: they're childish. One of the collections of Bill Watterson's comic strip Calvin and Hobbes is titled Something Under the Bed is Drooling (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1988). The success of this comic strip depends largely on the way it depicts with savage brilliance the essential alienation of the intelligent child. How can somebody so young sing words so mad?

Popular culture is filled with angst. And it sells. This should not come as too much of a surprise, as much canonised culture also deals with anxiety, futility, and essential alienation. Confronting fears is used as a method of controlling them. Binkley (of the late Bloom County comic strip) is not the only one with an Anxiety Closet. Adults laugh at Calvin's fear of the monster under the bed, even as they remember only too clearly their own monster. Feminist/psycho-analytic/literary critic Jane Gallop is forced to concede that death or marriage are "the only true endings for books" (Reading Lacan 185). And to again quote the tremendously popular Morrissey, godhead of moribund mirthlessness, "if it's not Love/Then it's the Bomb/That will bring us together" [11]. Assuming that not only romance readers and perverts wish to allay what psycho-analysts call separation anxiety, assuming that "Only connect..." can be an epigraph to more than a Forster novel, it must be noted that feminists critics and novelists do not appear to have much faith in love. Romances focus to such an extent on the difficulties inherent in any relationship ("That is not what I meant, at all") in order to exorcise the fear; that is what I meant, after all. (Modernism and high art be damned.) Would it be worth it, after all? In

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[10] The Smiths. "Sheila Take a Bow." By Morrissey and Marr. Louder Than Bombs. Sire, 92 55691, 1987. (The cover of this album is a photograph of Shelagh Delaney.)

[11] The Smiths. "Ask." Louder Than Bombs. Does the album title mean Morrissey is not so moribund, after all, that there is a hidden glimmer of optimism?

romances, the answer is yes. There are no Prufrocks among romance protagonists, and no nuclear (family) apocalypses at the end of the texts, either.

After all, the heroine's survival of the "confrontation polémique" can be seen as a test; if she wins this confrontation, she is worthy to advance into the next stage of life; that of wife (and mother, and successful businesswoman). The readers expect this. As Marcia Lieberman wrote of fairy tale heroines, "Ultimately, her loneliness and her suffering are sentimentalized and become an integral part of the glamour" (in Zipes 194). The struggle through which the heroine goes is not perceived as cruel by readers, unless, if one to accept Romantic Times reviews as speaking for the "average" romance reader, the polemicised confrontation is pro forma, and unmotivated by the plot. The hero must also capitulate with good grace, since there must be no doubt that he is completely in love.

The only critics who seem to appreciate the point behind the polemicism, and the danger inherent in many romance adventures, are the writers in Krentz's anthology. Even they do not, by and large, make it a focus of their essays. Anne Stuart explains: "The stakes are much more interesting when there's something at stake beyond happy-ever-after" (86). Of her ideal hero she says:

> "Deep in my heart I want more than just a man. I want a fallen angel [...] The threat that kind of hero offers is essential to his appeal [...] The heroine can either bring light into the darkness or risk suffocating in the blackness of his all-encompassing despair" (85-6).

Although her own preference for such heroes may, she states, be "too threatening" (86) for some readers, all romance heroes embody a threat. This is part of being the "Alpha male" who is one of the enduring elements of the genre. And, of course, by having a "fallen angel" hero, the contrast with the heroine and the way in which she transforms the hero throughout the course of the novel becomes that much more evident. As Suzanne Simmons Guntrum states, "in the end [of a romance] there is no ambiguity, no tragedy, no defeat" (152-3).

However, it's not only in the figure of the hero that such a dichotomy is evident. It permeates the romance novel. Sandra Brown's essay is titled "The Risk of

Seduction and the Seduction of Risk." Risk appears to be the romance code for angst. Penelope Williamson claims, "In a sense the entire plot of the romance novel becomes a metaphor for the risk that women take when they fall in love" (129). And in Amanda Quick's Dangerous, at one of the climactic moments of the plot, the heroine muses:

> Prudence took a deep breath and thrust aside her doubts and hesitations. The risk she was about to take was worth it, she assured herself. She was going to marry the man she loved (161).

"The world well lost"

Both Marxist and feminist critics are strongly normative. They wish to do away with the current ideology informing society, true, but they wish to replace it with one of their choosing. Perhaps part of their grievance against popular culture is simply that it is popular and accepted with seeming little effort. To quote Leonard Cohen:

> and all the ladies go moist and the judge
> has no choice a singer must die
> for the lie in his voice [12].

Romance heroes are a shadow figure, not just of the reader's psyche, but of society. They are Outsiders. Like Camus's Meursault, they are alienated from their emotions; it is for this reason that their declaration of love to the heroine only appears at the end of the text. The hero must consciously realise what his subconscious has long since acknowledged; that he is capable of loving, of connecting with the heroine. This is the final barrier the hero must overcome; once he acknowledges it, there is no need for further text. In any case, the "prime-time" transition between (spiritual)

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[12] Fatima Mansions. "A singer must die." By Leonard Cohen. I'm Your Fan. Oscar/Menhir, CD 75598, 1991.

virgin to wife has been accomplished. As stated earlier, once a woman is focalising as a mother, men tend to recede in importance.

In many current romances, the paradigm is reversed, and it is the heroine who needs to acknowledge her love; such is the case in Southern Rapture, quoted above. Still, the climactic moment of the novel remains the same; the mutual expression of love. The protagonists, at the end, manage to say what they have long since meant to say; their meaning has been understood, and accepted. The very reversibility of the gender roles indicates that in the final analysis, the romance is not so much about power as it is about communication.

If the critics fail to grasp this, they have failed to grasp the essence of the romance. In doing so, they will never be able to approach or evaluate it in a meaningful, fruitful way. Carter's denial of her attraction, Robinson's refusal to discuss it, and other critics' use of a prefigured, normative ideology and view of the romance reader as Other are all stunning examples of bad faith. If her desire for a satisfactory resolution, for a reaffirmation that she is lovable, that one can connect with others, lays the romance reader open to charges of being "criminally vulgar", the suspicion must remain that by and large, she is "just like everybody else" [13].

Elucidating unconscious desires, containing paradoxical elements, the romance text is not as straightforward as most critics claim. It posits a world with two value systems, true, but it also champions the female world over the male one. Drawing upon Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own, Gabriele Wittke posits three levels of l'écriture féminine: The feminine, where the values of the masculine traditions are internalised; the feminist, where the values of the masculine tradition are protested and alternatives are suggested; and the female, which entails a search for identity and self-discovery, and a freedom from opposition (143). It will be demonstrated that the successful romance text incorporates all three of these levels.

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[13] A reference to the The Smiths song "How Soon Is Now?" This song was so popular, it recently appeared in a television beer commercial. Lyrics run in part:

I am the son/and the heir/of a shyness that is criminally vulgar/I am the son and heir/of nothing in particular//You shut your mouth/how can you say/I go about things the wrong way//I am Human and I need to be loved/Just like everybody else does.

By Morrissey and Marr. The Smiths...Best I. Sire, W2 45042, 1992.

Instead of proceeding in a mechanistic fashion from beginning to end, the only critical approach that will elucidate the (perhaps embarrassing) appeal of the romance is the circular caucus race approach from Alice in Wonderland. Despite the chaotic appearance of the race, it achieved its purpose. Everybody got dry, and better yet, there were no losers. In the conclusion to her discussion of Rembrandt, Mieke Bal stated, "my aim in this study is not to make 'Rembrandt' simpler but more complex" (329). She believes that making things simpler does not generate further fruitful discussion, since what is often most interesting is "not what the painting [or the text] means, but what members of the consuming culture can do with it" (74). With regards to popular culture, the reception of the work is not only the most interesting, it is also the most illuminating facet of the production process. In her discussions of Rembrandt's canvases, Bal begins by pointing out details that are incongruous, and exploring outwards from there. Therefore, in the next chapter, we will begin with an examination of one of the most persistent holes in the romance text; the treatment of sexuality.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE SEMI-DEMOTICS OF ROMANCE SEX:

## a polarised dichotomy

> Well, in brothels, what they used to do [...] was, sometimes, with the younger girls, they used to make a little bag of blood [...] And the girl would pop it up herself, and the other women would get going, I think with ordinary candle wax, and they'd seal her up. And then they'd sell her as a virgin [...] And the client would push his way past the candle wax [...] and the girl would give a yelp and flinch and squeeze her thighs together and burst the bag and sob a little and mutter some crap to make the man feel powerful and conquering but most of all first.
>
> Julian Barnes

> It is a better thing to be adored for one's difference than shunned for it.
>
> Angela Carter

Regardless of degree of sexual explicitness, there is one element above all others that romance editors demand: sexual tension [1]. Sexual tension is a description of the growing attraction between hero and heroine. It should be present in every scene they enact together, and grow in intensity until the end of the text, when the couple realise they cannot live without each other, that their destinies are irretrievably intertwined. The goal of sexual tension is to draw the reader into the story, to facilitate their identification with the exciting story (falling in love) which is unfolding.

Any discourse on sexuality that, due to ideological considerations, ignores or deliberately excludes any function or motif which challenges the ideological

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[1] According to information, both verbal and written, distributed at industry conferences. See for example Naomi Horton, "Making Them Tick," distributed at Rendezvous '92 (Calgary, Alberta: May 15-17, 1992). Also see How to Write a Romance, incl. pp. 10, 23, 142-49, and publisher's tipsheets.

hegemony being proposed will not, in the final analysis, provide either a meaningful discourse on the subject or propose realistic solutions. The popularity of romance shows that the ideology of sexuality proposed, no matter how disturbing to the politically correct vanguard, either has appeal or still controls through guilt. It cannot be dismissed or ignored; it must be explored. Because a manuscript must be imbued with the incremental sexual tension, it is difficult to encapsulate it; therefore much of this chapter will focus on discrete units ("sex scenes") rather than the texts as total entities. In his lectures on popular fiction of the 1930s Frank Kermode speaks of "the great truth that all knowledge of the other, all intercourse between opposites, is analogous to carnal knowledge" (31). While one hopes he is referring only to fictional worlds, not to the actual one, his theory certainly holds true for the protagonists in romance.

There are two types of world view in the romance: one based on self-sufficiency and social codes, and the other prizing the ability to relate with others and emphasising intuitive knowledge. The heroine usually embodies the latter world view; it is considered by sociologists such as Jessie Bernard as a feminine mode of behaviour. Romances are awash with phrases such as: "masculine instincts" (Rendezvous 58), "female pride" (Surrender 330), "the masculine scent of him" (Ravished 272) and "feminine vitality" (Ravished 118). (All novels by Amanda Quick.) Femininity is much prized in the romance world. The problem therefore lies in defining femininity:

> People do not have femininity; there is no such entity or substance. Rather, there is a myriad of behaviors springing from innumerable identifications, fantasies and beliefs, the algebraic sum of which is called femininity, none being, necessarily--in all places and at all times--distinctively characteristic (Stoller, "On Femininity", 127).

In the actual world, femininity is a prokaryotic state. However, in the paradigmatic romance text, it is most definitely eukaryotic. What, then is the nucleus of romance femininity?

The essence of femininity is a joyous, willing belief in a transcendental love, that can justify all means, and overcome the boundaries of the self. The essence of

masculinity in romances often entails, among other characteristics, an attempt to deny instinctive knowledge of this type of transcendant love. The conflict in many plots, especially in historicals, is generated by the heroine's attempt to convince the hero of the truth of her world view. Complications arise with the addition of erotic desire to the mixture. Sexuality in the actual world is often polymorphous; in the romance world, there are still limits placed on what is considered acceptable sexually, but these are changing drastically. The response evoked in the reader is often ambiguous, as it may be in real-life erotic situations. Even the responses of hero and heroine to their textual situations tend to combine contradictory emotions.

In Sexual Fiction Maurice Charney makes a distinction between the D. H. Lawrence attitude towards sex and the Henry Miller attitude (13, 93-112). For Lawrence, sex is not just sex; its signification is grandiose, and sex itself is a portentous undertaking. For Miller, sex is everywhere, "easy and fortuitous" (99), even "Rabelaisian" (101). In the romance, despite the clear polarity which usually exists between male and female sexuality, the sexual interaction of the protagonists must be of the Lawrence kind. Ethel Spector Person notes that "Sex qua sex [...] is an impossibility. Sex will always be permeated with meanings that attach to the individual and social parameters" (58). Romances reflect this attitude.

The heroine "gives" herself to the hero; it is with this "gift" of love that he redeems himself (Krentz, "Trying to Tame" 111; Malek, "Loved I Not Honor More" 115-20). This capacity of the heroine to heal may give her some moral superiority; unfortunately, she is often too inexperienced to make correct decisions in dangerous situations, and therefore relies on the innate, but undiscovered, goodness of the hero to save her. Historically, women were accorded a moral superiority to make up for their enforced legal, financial, political and educational inferiority to males (Bernard 471). One outward sign of this superiority was chastity.

Sexual tension in the romances is therefore an exalted thing, indicative of destiny. Sexual motifs in romances are being broadened to include almost all aspects of a woman's reproductive life, but the most common sexual motif, besides the initial meeting and discovery of mutual sexual attraction, is virginity, and the concomitant

defloration scene. Sex scenes are often the most highly encoded scenes in the entire book, along with the reflective textual dilations. Despite the highly repetitive and coloured language used, romance sex, like sacred bread, tends to be devoid of leavening ingredients.

"What kind of man is he?"

The Alpha male may be at the very centre of paradigmatic romances (Kinsale). This male embodies risk, not only in the way he views his own life, but in the way he thwarts the heroine's intentions. A heroine in romance, as many of Krentz's contributors point out (Malek, Williamson, Arnold), embodies traits traditionally considered heroic including loyalty, courage and integrity. The Alpha male usually has a tormented past that makes it impossible for him to commit fully to another person. Often the crucial incident is revealed only at the end of the text; the impact of the hero on the reader relies more on the code of writing used to describe him than it does on his actions. To illustrate this point, Krentz and Barlow translate the back cover copy on Amanda Quick's Seduction into ordinary discourse. "Townsfolk called him devil. For dark and enigmatic Julian, Earl of Ravenwood, was a man with a legendary temper..." (15) becomes "His acquaintances regard Julian, Earl of Ravenwood, as neurotic. He's an odd character with a belligerent temperament..." (25). The tougher the hero, the more of a challenge and the better foil he makes for the heroine (Malek, "Mad, Bad, and Dangerous", 75). In many novels, the hero appears as both hero and villain (Krentz, "Trying to Tame", 108), the prize and challenge rolled into one, or, in literary-critical discourse, the patriarchal logos and the female compromise. The hero must have some grounds for resisting the blandishments of the heroine (just as she must resist him), otherwise there would be no story. Heroes who do not have dark sides to their personality must therefore be embroiled in outside conflicts. However, romances must end happily, so the romance hero exits the novel reintegrated with the feminine or Gesellschaft side of his nature, a happy man.

Since romance heroes often embody a dark side, they are mostly a black-haired lot. They are tall and well-muscled, having a silhouette which has been identified as almost universally attractive [2]. In Mary Jo Putney's Silk and Secrets, "Ross had twice the shoulders and half the hips of the average man" (172).

It is no secret that the majority of romance figures owe much to popular perceptions of Romantic figures, including the actual (but mythologised) figure of Byron, and the popular culture perceptions of Charlotte Brontë's Rochester and Emily Brontë's Heathcliff. This is not surprising, as the novel first began to gain widespread popularity in the later eighteenth century, during the Gothic craze. (Minerva Press novels are sometimes lamentably commented upon by a Regency-era hero as being a bad influence on a romance heroine.) In popular terms, Heathcliff is more closely related to the brooding and sullen but nonetheless handsome and impassioned figure portrayed by Laurence Olivier than he is with the Brontë creation who hangs lapdogs and digs up the long-dead body of Cathy Linton. True nastiness is best avoided in the hero figure; if he is a hard man in an emotional sense (he always is physically) it usually springs from some past occurrence. However, just as the Romantic hero makes an immediate impression of contained virility, brooding mystery, and controlled power, so must the romance hero. It is an unusual romance in which it is not immediately apparent (to both reader and heroine) upon his introduction that the hero has arrived.

The most common areas in which this past hurt manifests itself are in ruthless dealings with obstacles (such as business associates, social inferiors and laws), and a cavalier approach to sexuality. As Krentz notes in "Trying to Tame the Romance," the dual features of the heroine's virginity and the aggressive seduction by the hero are two of the most enduring targets of reform by romance critics. Perhaps this is not unexpected; discussions and representations of sexuality appear to evoke strong feelings in many diverse people. Maurice Charney paraphrases Barthes, claiming that

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[2] Douglas T. Kendrick and Melanie R. Trost, "A Biosocial Theory of Heterosexual Relationships," Females, Males and Sexuality: Theories and Research, ed. Kathryn Kelley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) 70.

"eroticism is a highly formalized mode of ordering experience, essentially a mode of discourse" (9). This reinforces Ethel Spector Person's assertion that sex qua sex is impossible, in fiction as in life.

The question which must be asked to satisfy ideologues is if this attitude towards male sexuality in romances is "justified". Is male sexuality different from female sexuality? Unfortunately, it has proved impossible to separate biology from culture, and so the best answer available is that with changing social mores, the differences between male and female sexual experiences seem to be fewer (DeLamater 127). However, it is claimed that the way in which these experiences are decoded by males and females are substantially different (ibid. 127ff). In short, males are more likely to link sexual experience with physical gratification, while females associate it with intense emotions and reproduction. The assertion is made that males are also more likely to allow their sexual activities to be ordered by their peer group, although the cult of virginity which until recently governed female sexual behaviour was itself a social construct.

Like DeLamater, Ethel Spector Person feels that "Gender orders sexuality" (50). Further, "Sexuality, in turn, may be a mainstay of gender" (ibid.). Like many feminist theorists she finds male sexuality to be a paltry thing when compared to the polymorphy of female sexual organs and patterns of desire. She states: "In this culture, genital sexual activity is a prominent feature in the maintenance of masculine gender while it is a variable feature in feminine gender" (50). This may help to explain the usually strict demarcation between patterns of male and female sexual experience as presented in the romance. In this aspect at least, the romance reflects reality, while in its presentation of sexual union of the protagonists, it appears more likely that romances reflect pure fantasy.

In her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich, following Kathleen Gough, defines eight characteristics of male power (69-71): to deny women their sexuality (enforced chastity); to force male sexuality upon them (rape); to exploit their labour and control their produce (marriage); to control their children; physical confinement; to use women as objects in male transactions (as

brides); to deny their creativity, and finally to withhold knowledge and culture from them. Every single one of these demonstrations of male power has been used in romances; they are one of the indications of the imbalance of power that exists at the beginning of the microcosmic (i.e., only concerned with hero and heroine) romance world. For example, all eight characteristics can be found in Barbara Erskine's medieval reincarnation romance Lady of Hay. (This imbalance can never be corrected in the macrocosmic historical romance world, due to the real-world relations that are maintained.) It must not be assumed that these evidences of male power are accepted unquestioningly. In Katherine Kingsley's No Sweeter Heaven, the heroine protests to her nurse:

> I am nothing more than something to be exchanged in barter and then taken to bed in order to produce sons to carry on the same dreary tradition. What about me? I am an educated woman with a mind and a heart and, as I've been told so very often, a soul. My eternal soul and my mortal womb seem to be the only two things that matter to anyone other than myself, and I begin to think my womb is on top of that list. Look what happened to my mother (36).

The last sentence refers directly to one of the topics to be addressed later in this chapter: Fear of the Father.

The heroine's initial reaction to the hero cannot be separated from the entirety of her position in life. Gallop notes that psycho-analysis tends to mistakenly assume a family paradigm, so that a maid, governess or nurse becomes the locus of intrusion of the symbolic outside order into the imaginary world of the child (Daughter's Seduction 144). The romance heroine is traditionally isolated within her imaginary world, kept there by the restrictions of the phallocentric symbolic order. It is the hero who first embodies the temptations and makes manifest the restrictions of this order; it is therefore not surprising that the heroine develops such a strong attraction for the first person to show her an escape, no matter how circumscribed or compromised. And, as Gallop points out, while abandonment is a form of expulsion, seduction is a type of assimilation into the symbolic order (Daughter's Seduction 147). If Freudian-based psycho-analysts are correct, desire, fluid though it may be, seeks to destroy that

which it cannot assimilate. Therefore it is perhaps fortunate for both hero and heroine that a truce of some kind can be reached.

"Revelations of the bedchamber"

While this truce must involve emotional realignment on the part of the hero (and possibly the heroine), it is also arrived at through an enactment of desire, that is, through sexual congress. As has been noted before, sex scenes use a style of language specific to the romance. As they are heavily encoded, they form a popular target for mockery in both academia and the mass media (Barlow and Krentz 20). These scenes tend to appear ludicrous to the non-initiated reader, partly because they are so blatantly erotic in content (many people disassociate romance and sexuality), and so soft-focussed in presentation. The romance "code" is highly evident in such scenes, and despite the fascination of writers and reader with bodily interaction, euphemisms abound, most notably for the penis. However, articles such as the one in Spy [3], which lists 30-odd such phrases, do not note that in English, one has the choice between vulgarities, scientific terms and euphemisms. Penis is becoming acceptable in some lines, but almost the only other non-vulgar or vague term for it is the (politically correct because gender-neutral) "sex", which Spy labels a euphemism.

Many of the expressions, such as "proud shaft", "hard length", or "jutting manhood", glamourise the penis and enhance the sense of phallic (as opposed to merely penile) hardness. The penis is rarely ever seen when detumescent. One novel that is notable for the demystification of the penis is Diana Gabaldon's 1992 bestseller Outlander. After a night of passionate sex:

> My innards felt like churned butter. It felt as though I had been beaten with a blunt object, I reflected, then thought that that was very near the truth. The blunt object in question was visible as I came back to bed, looking now relatively harmless (438).

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[3] Leah Rozen, "Manroot Envy? Spy's Guide to Phallo-Euphemisms," Spy June 1993: 26.

When the hero is teaching his young nephew "the fine art of not pissing on his feet" (593), he comments that "It's a bit difficult, isn't it, when your cock doesna stick out any further than your belly button?" (ibid.). Such non-awe-inspiring presentations of the penis are rare, as are references to its second known function.

As for female genitalia, vagina is heard much less often and has more overtly scientific connotations than penis (which is now being used even on prime-time news), and vulva is a term that is often overlooked even by sex educators [4]. Pudenda is even worse--its derivation is from the Latin verb meaning to shame. Therefore the language in romances must be highly encoded. Enhancing the sense of sexual congress as mysterious and exalted, one finds such expressions as "the soft flower that shielded her secrets" (Quick, Ravished, 231) when referring to the female genitalia. The clitoris is often given a separate mention, for example, as "the tiny nub that was the center of female sensation" (300) in Mary Jo Putney's Thunder and Roses.

By and large, the heroine, inexperienced as she is, is responsive (not active) and that she is an apt learner, or a willing pupil, but never a masterful instructress (the exception to this in my corpus is Outlander). Kay Mussell points out that according to Masters and Johnson, there are three levels of sexuality: in the first, the man does sex to the woman, in the second he performs it for the woman, and in the third, he performs with the woman (Fantasy and Reconciliation 128). Romances, likely as a result of societal taboos, originated with level one sex in the early Seventies, and now most commonly portray level two sex. The third level is sometimes portrayed, particularly towards the end of texts.

The view one takes of sexuality as presented in the paradigmatic romance world depends on one's own ideological perspective. Krentz admits that what most writers write is not what most writers practice or believe (Introduction 7). Nevertheless, on some level they imagine that this dichotomised sexuality either

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[4] Mildred Ash, "The Misnamed Female Sex Organ," Women's Sexual Development: Explorations of Inner Space, ed. Martha Kirkpatrick (New York: Plenum Press, 1980) 171-179.

represents an ideal, or is as close to the ideal as it is possible to come. They do not see themselves as passively reflecting the status quo, which is what many literary critics, including Mussell, Radway and Modleski allege, using this argument to both excuse and trivialise these novels to their (male) academic peers.

It would be interesting to compare sex as portrayed in romance novels with erotic writings by women. Anthologies of erotic fiction by (and mostly for) women have recently become popular. My own impression, from perusal of four such anthologies [5], is that while in these collections a wider variety of issues are considered both possible and erotic, the way sexual encounters are described in many cases closely resembles the writing of sexual scenes in romance fiction.

One of the chief elements that appears, both in romance and in women's erotica, to constitute the erotic, is the breaking of barriers. While writers of erotica, presumably wishing to demonstrate their sexual sophistication, tend to be diverse in their described sexual activities, for the romance heroine, often the very act of lovemaking is perceived as a major taboo. Given the frequent historical settings, this is not too surprising; in contemporary romances, heroines are often sexually inexperienced or unsure about sexual commitment, because it has proved disappointing in the past.

Yet in the Introductions to erotic anthologies, the female editors point out that in opposition to erotica written by males, for their contributors, there is a special feeling of closeness with their fantasy partner, even if they have just met (see Erotic Interludes 9). It is perhaps in the interest of editors of women-only written anthologies to stress that female erotica differs from male-written, otherwise there is no point to their activity, yet these women are again claiming that female sexuality is a different entity than male sexuality. Barbach also makes the incredibly telling

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[5] Lonnie Barbach, ed. Pleasures: Women Write Erotica (New York: Doubleday, 1984) and Erotic Interludes: Tales Told by Women (New York: Doubleday, 1986), Susie Bright, ed. Herotica (Burlingame, CA: Down There Press, 1988), and Michele Slung, ed. Slow Hand: Women Writing Erotica (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

comment that "[m]ost often, the partners of the women in the stories have an aura of mystery about them: they have a dark side" (ibid., 7).

What is almost uniformly consistent with romance writing in female erotic fiction is the insistence that somehow, with the Right Man, sex is a transcendent, sparkling experience that transforms the participants and explodes the universe, which rearranges itself to become a much better place than it was before. For all the writers, sex is a portentous thing, with grave ramifications. There is the longed-for possibility of an enduring love, perhaps even the actualization of it, with the right man or woman. One editor of an anthology talks of the piles of manuscripts received (Slung xviii), from which she selected a small number. It is impossible to ascertain if women have only found their D.H. Lawrence voice, or if some do write like Henry Miller, and such stories have been edited out, as being too "male".

"The wor(l)d begetting, by the wor(l)d begot"

Obviously, with such a sexual morality, divided along gender lines, as discussed above, the defloration scene is of the utmost importance in historical romances. It must be asked: why? What does defloration signify in the moral code of the romance? Is it becoming less common? Is the way it is portrayed changing? During this crucial moment in one of the novels by the originator of the erotic historical, Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's A Rose in Winter (1980), two things emerge; the newness of such sensations to the heroine and the overwhelming way she reacts to them; and the way heroic sacrifice seems to be an integral part of the sexual experience. "She could no more retreat from her course than the gallant Joan of Arc [...] She waited, struggling with her fears and the almost overwhelming desire to flee" (346-47). The dark side of love is very much in evidence in this book; the hero's lips brand and sear; his touch burns; his penis is a "fiery brand" (348). It is no wonder that it is a torture to be loved. Like the troubadours' chansons, which developed into the minnesingers' songs, sexual passion seems akin to religious passion in that it

encompasses both suffering and release. There is an undercurrent of masochism, which enforces the nobleness of the heroine's giving of herself.

This concept of the unwilling surrender of virginity was perhaps given currency by the medieval insistence on a tripartite division of women into virgin, widow and wife. Due in no small part to Mariolatry, virginity was considered by far the most desirable state (Casagrande 79-82). This concept of chastity extended into all areas of a woman's behaviour and comportment (83-84); even after marriage, "conjugal chastity" was to be observed (Vecchio 112-115), meaning that sexual union was to be undertaken only to serve God's purpose (i.e., procreation). This same concept of moderation in temporal indulgences formed part of the doctrines of Protestant sects such as the Puritans (Gilmore 28). However, as L'Hermite-Leclerq makes clear, the doctrines were apparently more applicable to females than to males. "In this respect the divorce between the sexes may have been consummated in the twelfth century; it was destined to last for nearly a millennium" (213).

In romances, the sense of risk is still evident in most defloration scenes, but it is psychical, not physical or spiritual danger. These are scenes in which romance writers hope that reader identification will be with both participants. However, it is evident that an inexperienced female is at greater risk during these scenes than a male; sexual intercourse always carries the possibility of motherhood for a woman.

Historians argue that women's chastity was insisted upon partly in order to ensure that property was passed on to the correct offspring (Vecchio 114-15). Therefore, it is seen as essential to the male-ordained social structure. It gains the added level of being a loving gift in the romance, not merely a duty owed to a husband. This may be seen as a rationalisation of what feminists would call oppression.

Krentz claims that virginity is:

> a metaphor for the qualities of female power, honor, generosity and courage with which the heroine is imbued [...] There is an heroic quality about a woman's virginity that is truly powerful when used to its fullest potential in fiction ("Trying to Tame" 111).

Her novels with virgin heroines outsell those of authors with non-virgin heroines (ibid.), as shown by comparing royalty statements. The hero, in turn, must appreciate the gift (not trophy) of the heroine's virginity. Both protagonists are therefore altered by the experience, and the heroine demonstrates to the reader that she has chosen the correct man. "She takes a risk," Krentz explains, adding, "Virginity is symbolic of the high stakes involved" (112).

Some literary critics agree with this assessment of the signification of virginity in the romance. Bettinotti et al. note that "virginité est plutôt la marque corporelle d'une mise a l'épreuve de l'héroïne et de sa dignité (98)." Among the romance apologists, Doreen Owens Malek in "Loved I Not Honor More" cites her own fascination with Vestal Virgins, with the mythological figures of Diana, Ariadne, Atalanta, Daphne, Cassandra, the Anglo-Saxon Maid Marian and Tennyson's Elaine, among others, to demonstrate that "there is a long tradition of virginity as an attribute of feminine heroism and an unmistakable indication of the elect" (117). She feels that sex is "that essential earthbound activity which transforms a girl into a woman" (117), and that this transition is especially powerful in romances because "virginity is a gift that can only be given once, and it is ideally bestowed on a woman's great love" (118). Defloration is therefore bound up with red blood. It is interesting, considering the meaning of the name Adam, usually given as something approximating "man of red earth," that romance heroines are almost invariably referred to in terms of Eve when they are interacting sexually with their partners, especially with the added fact that the "gift" of the heroine's virginity is supposed to irrevocably change the hero, making a new man of him. However, the improved union between male and female leads the protagonists into an Edenic marriage, complete with progeny, rather than leading them out of it.

Perhaps there is some justice to the romance view that defloration is best undertaken by the hero, if Freud is correct in any of the speculations he makes in "The Taboo of Virginity". He claims that in (his) society, virginity is a sign of being a "good" woman, so that the person deflowering must overcome the resistance implanted in the woman by the cultural milieu (193). Because defloration involves

not just pain but also loss of sexual value (202), it is quite likely that a less than satisfactory first sexual experience will result in a release of hostility towards the man (200). Therefore defloration offers the man one chance to bond the woman to him (193). He adds that while sexual bondage means that one person develops a high degree of dependence on the other with whom s/he has a sexual relationship, to some degree it is necessary in order to develop a long-standing relationship (ibid.). He does not say whether this dependency should be mutual--in romances it is. If the act of defloration is fraught with such danger, perhaps it would take a hero to successfully complete the task.

Just as the heroine gifts the hero, it must be noted that a scrumptious initiation is seen as the hero's gift to the heroine. It excuses much of his past behaviour, both before and since the appearance of the heroine in his life. This is made explicit in the Second World War romance Morning Glory, set in small-town America, by LaVyrle Spencer:

> "You all right, Elly?"
> She smiled and touched his chin. "Shh...I'm holdin' it in."
> "What?"
> "Everything. All the feelin's you give me."
> "Aw, Elly..."
> He kissed her forehead and she spoke against his chin. "I had three babies, Will--three of 'em--but I never had this. I didn't know nothin' about this." [...]
> "Maybe 'cause you were married to a good man who never visited a whorehouse."
> "You're a good man, Will, don't you say different. And if that's what you learned there, I'm glad you went" (248).

Elly is not a virgin, but nevertheless the first sexual experience with the hero is an initiation, because she experiences sexual pleasure for the first time. The romance leaves no doubt that the hero is responsible for giving the heroine pleasure. (Likewise he finds his sexual relations with the heroine to be the most enjoyable he has ever had.)

When romances do deal directly with the sexual double standard, they are as likely to uphold it as to condemn it. In a novel notable mostly for its unrelenting,

overwhelming use of romance code, Crown of Dreams by Kimberley Cates, the hero is one of the most notorious rakes in Europe, and the heroine is completely innocent. Part of the wedding night conversation runs as follows:

> "Dev, I'd be a liar if I said I was sorry I'd be the first man ever to make love to you. There is something special in that--a gift a woman can give but once."
>
> Devlin walked to a stool and sank down on it, but she smiled just a little. "Isn't it the same for men? I mean, the first time, isn't it a gift?"
>
> Myles laughed, and the sound warmed her. "Maybe for some men. But for most, I think virginity is like handling a horseshoe still glowing from a blacksmith's fire--they want to get rid of it as quickly as they can, and they don't much care who they throw the blasted thing at" (259-260).

Some novels bitterly condemn the double standard, without, however, resolving it. In The Demon Lover by Victoria Holt, the hero, who is an anachronistic feudal-style baron, and who has fathered a child on the heroine, marries a princess for her bloodlines, an action the heroine deplores. The marriage does not turn out happily:

> "She has foisted that bastard on me. It is the worst thing she could have done to me."
>
> "See it her way. You understand these sudden impulses. Why should it be accepted that a man may indulge his and it is so dreadful when a woman does."
>
> "Because of the results when a woman does."
>
> "There may well be results, which should concern the men" (247-8).

In the fictionalised biography of Jane Maxwell, Duchess of Gordon (1749-1812), Island of the Swans, Ciji Ware attempts to "combine the facts that are known [...] with intelligent supposition about what is not known" in order to examine "the life of a woman of great achievement" (v-vi). However, Jane's story does not end happily as her estranged husband attempts to pauperise her and besmirch her reputation. When she challenges him regarding his own behaviour in fathering numerous bastards, she is "shaking with a rage that nearly made her faint" (465). The response is clear: "`That, my dear, is the joy of being a duke and not a duchess,' he said malevolently, crossing her threshold into the hall. `I do as I please'" (465). Even though the argument may have begun about sexual mores, Ware makes it clear

that this was only one of the ways in which men controlled women's lives. Anger is a common theme in the historical heroine; it is always resolved in dress historicals, and usually in motivated historicals. However, in a fictionalised biography, the loose ends do not tie up as easily.

"Honi soit qui mal y pense"

Are males as interested in the question of female virginity as women writers obviously are? The exalted romance defloration is not the only paradigm to emerge in women's writing: in contrast, there is the pragmatic view taken in such novels as Françoise Sagan's Bonjour Tristesse, and in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, the heroine's realisation of the sexual double standard enables her to turn from the cult of virginity pressed upon her by her mother to a pragmatic encounter, which unfortunately ends with an immodest amount of blood. One example of popular male writing is Skinny Legs and All by Tom Collins (1990; New York: Bantam, 1991), which was hailed by that arbiter of male culture, Playboy, as "Flat-out Fabulous". It includes the following comment as the male protagonist is engaging in intercourse with his wife:

> There had been other spelunkers in these hollows, that she had confessed, but he took solace in the knowledge that he'd been first, that his was the brush that had left the hunting scenes upon her labial Lascaux (45).

This would indicate that "being first" is of some importance to the male ego, and also shows how even male writers somehow drift into mythological and euphemistic references when writing about sex. As noted above, this latter may have to do with the limitations of English, but the former can be explained only by a desire to portray sex as somehow cosmically significant.

Yet why in romances is such a double standard accepted by a female audience, when women are the gender far more restricted by this dichotomy? In Freud's essay "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in Love," he claims that many men do not receive particular pleasure from coitus (184), because the sexual double standard which denies sexuality for "well-brought-up" women means that a

male will turn for sexual release to partners who cannot judge him but who can be judged by him (185), so that his guilt regarding sexual activity can be redirected into contempt for non-good women. Therefore a man's affection and his sensuality become divided. This divided sexuality also has an effect on the repressed women:

> In our civilized world women are under the influence of a similar after-effect of their upbringing, and, in addition, of their reaction to men's behaviour. It is naturally just as unfavourable for a woman if a man approaches her without his full potency as it is if his initial overvaluation of her when he is in love gives place to undervaluation after he has possessed her. In the case of women there is little sign of a need to debase their sexual object...But their long holding back from sexuality and the lingering of their sexuality in phantasy has another important consequence for them. They are subsequently often unable to undo the connection between sensual activity and prohibition and prove to be psychically impotent, that is frigid, when such activity is at last allowed them (my emphasis 186).

Romance heroines almost always have an idealised vision of a sexual and emotional union even before they meet the hero. Whether this comes from an innate feminine sense of the world, or whether it is enhanced by the heroine's choice of reading material, it is still a fantasy. The hero is always at full potency when he meets the heroine (in fact, he may be just a little too potent); therefore, the heroine's sexuality becomes irrevocably linked with the hero. Romances frequently include statements such as: "she certainly could not envision making love with any other man except Simon" (Quick, Scandal, 166), and "there has never been a man like you, and there never will be again [...] I'll always love you" (Putney, Silk and Shadows, 430-431). This may be viewed as a type of frigidity, but in romances, the hero always comes to heel, so the problem of her Pavlovian sexuality never arises.

Freud feels that "the condition of forbiddenness in the erotic life of women is, I think, comparable to the need on the part of men to debase their sex object" (186-7). The romance hero is initially dangerous, often because of his dark-tinged past, and certainly because of his exaggerated phallic hardness. Risk, forbiddenness, dangerous men--the motifs all coalesce. Freud, regardless of whether his models are temporally limited or whether they reflect his own inner desires more accurately than

"real" life, wrote an essay which is uncannily accurate in depicting the dynamics of sexual relations in the romance.

Why is the romance so obsessed with virginity? The romance hero, as discussed, is a dangerous-seeming outsider who not only transgresses "decency" with his potent sexuality, but who also induces the heroine to transgress. Perhaps the romance heroine's surrendering of her virginity is a way of assimilating the phallic hardness of the hero that promises the ability to transgress. After all, at the culmination of the sexual encounter: "Julian shuddered heavily, pouring himself into her, filling her, losing himself in her" (Quick, Surrender, 215).

Both Freud and Kermode's observations illustrate to what extent nineteenth century values still inhibit contemporary consciousness. A contemporary of mine, also a romance reader, suggested to me that the division between sexuality and affection, shown as a gender issue in romances, is perhaps more of a generation issue, and that the gender division still exists in romances because of the age of most of the writers published today (and of their audience). It will be interesting to see if the few romances that do not espouse such a gender division do indeed represent a vanguard, or only marginal curiosities in the genre. Certainly, if the motif of female virginity disappears, the quality of sexual tension in the romance will change, but the erotic historical has already changed considerably since the early seventies and has become ever more popular.

One of the concessions made to excuse the double standard is hinted at in E.S. Person's comment that "male sexuality frequently appears driven rather than liberated" (61). It is a societal pressure and a means of establishing identity that the hero who cannot bear scorn (often due to early rejection) goes along with. Overtly virile sexuality is sometimes mocked outright, as in this passage from Mary Jo Putney's Thunder and Roses, when the hero recounts his experience of indulging in the "common male fantasy to bed two women at once" (161):

> "Do you know what my most vivid memory of this orgy is? [...] Carpet burns on the knees, that's what I remember. In order to keep either of the ladies from getting bored, it was necessary to crawl back and forth

> constantly. An exhausting experience, and I limped for a week." He paused pensively. "It taught me that some fantasies are better off remaining in the mind" (161-2).

It is a rare hero who bucks (rather than fucks) the trend: it is far more common indeed to see a hero whose sexuality is driven by his past, for example Morgan Kane in Kathleen Sutcliffe's Shadowplay. Kane, who grew up as white trash in nineteenth century New Orleans, was abandoned by his prostitute mother after one of her clients sexually assaulted the boy. When Kane managed to escape from the orphanage where his mother took him, he went back to find her, but she denied any knowledge of him. Captured looking for gold in the Brazilian jungle, Kane is tortured and sexually abused by a landowner who he believes has befriended him. At the opening of the novel, he is working as a male prostitute to both Indian women who believe he is a god for surviving the jungle, and to rich white women who refuse to acknowledge him by day. He certainly has enough motivation to make his sexuality a rather tormented force. Kane is a strong example of the wounded hero.

Ross Carlisle in Putney's Silk and Secrets represents a hero who defies social standards of sexuality, but he has something in common with Kane; they have both been hurt by women. Kane was hurt most deeply by his mother's betrayal, and then by the heroine who refuses to marry him at first, preferring her society fiancé; Carlisle by his wife, who deserts him six months after marriage. (The heroine is his estranged wife; she left him in a fit of temporary insanity brought on by irrational fears during the first trimester of her teenage pregnancy.)

Carlisle has a pragmatic approach to the issue of sexuality, one which hints at an awareness of gender and class inequality:

> I found the thought of buying a woman's favors distasteful [...] Nor was seducing a maid an acceptable alternative--I had no desire to father a bastard or ruin a girl's life. It was simpler to put my energies into things like learning Arabic (255).

Pascal LaMartine, hero of No Sweeter Heaven, explains to a priest: "I didn't think that God meant for me to go about mindlessly rutting for my own pleasure with no

thought to the sanctity of marriage" (201). For him chastity is a choice that has to do with a religious conviction. Perhaps the most compelling reason is offered by Jamie in Outlander who states that he has no wish to place his behaviour at the "lowest common denominator" (275). Happily, in no case does this unusual chastity before marriage affect either the hero's virility or his ability to satisfy his partner after marriage.

However, romance heroes choose chastity. Many romance heroines have little choice but to remain chaste. In Colleen McCullough's novel The Ladies of Missalonghi [6], set in turn of the century Australia, the heroine has been sent to a specialist with an undiagnosed complaint. She has an opportunity to read the letter of the referring physician:

> "I do indeed suspect hysteria, as her life's circumstances would make it a most likely diagnosis. She leads a stagnant, deprived existence (vide her breast development). But to be on the safe side, I would like you to see her with a view to excluding any serious illness."
>
> Missy put the letter down and closed her eyes. Did the whole world see her with pity and contempt? And how could pride contend with so much pity and contempt when it was so well-meaning? [...] "With a view to excluding any serious illness", as if stagnation and deprivation and old maidenhood were not serious illnesses within themselves!
>
> She opened her eyes, surprised to discover that they contained not one tear. Instead, they were bright and dry and angry (123).

Again, anger is a commonplace in the romance world; many heroines feel they are being treated unfairly. Whether this is anachronistic or not, it is typical of the way the historical setting is used, as a way both to explore and defuse inflammatory conditions.

In the romance world, as "In our society, marriage is the privileged locus for the interaction of the two sexes; it is the agency that reflects and regulates our attitude towards sexuality" (Furman 76). However, the structure of the romance

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[6] This novel has a plot that is pure romance, but the language used is not the dense, lush, heavily adjectival romance code. Therefore it is by no means certain that romance readers would view this text as being a (paradigmatic) romance. This issue will be explored further in later chapters.

confuses things: the fabula may be of all happy couples, but the récit concerns itself with the specific couple formed by the protagonists (Bettinotti et al. 83). Yet it is nonetheless true, as Jessie Bernard states, "there is clear evidence that although individual men may love individual women with great depth and devotion, the male world as a whole does not" (11). This is reflected especially in the institutions and relations of the real world that are preserved in the fictional world of historical romances. At the end of Seduction, when one of the hero's friends asks him for the secret of a happy marriage, he replies: "That, my friend, you must discover for yourself. I fear there is no easy path to domestic harmony" (340). Although romances refer to problems of gender relations found in the real world, they do not even pretend to offer overall solutions. In direct opposition to Tolstoy's canonised comment that all happy families resemble one another, there is an insistence, encoded within the texts, that each couple in each romance is unique. This may help explain why so many romances can be read without the readers tiring of them: a romance reader may very well see not the similarities, but the differences.

"The vanitas of sex"

Krentz claims that during romance sex scenes, the reader is identifying with both the hero and the heroine. She further feels that this dual identification is unique to romance ("Trying to Tame" 111). Louise Kaplan claims that in pornography:

> The master is turned on by the slave's submission to him. The slave is turned on by the master's domination over her. The reader is turned on by being in the positions of both slave and master (338).

She believes that romances are female pornography because they reenact the typical pornographic dichotomies of submission-dominance, innocence-lechery motifs (336). She defines pornography, not by degree of sexual explicitness, but by the hate hidden beneath the perverse strategy of inciting desire: the desire to destroy completely that which cannot be assimilated (357). The "hate" which a romance hero might be expected, in Kaplan's view, to feel for the innocent heroine is obvious: he wishes to

infect her with his cynicism (outright lechery is not usually associated with the hero in romances). However, the heroine also wishes to destroy the phallic male she longs for:

> As we meet this venturesome [compare with Krentz's epithet "adventurous"] young lady, she is on the verge of knowing the unknown. The reader attends as the virgin patiently peels away each of the many shells of phallic hardness until at last she arrives at the soft custard of domestic desire at the centre of the man's being--the caring, protective, loving, husband (325-6).

This coincides precisely with the heroic struggle that Krentz's contributors claim for their heroines (e.g., Phillips 53, Clair 71, Malek 77, Donald 83). The identification in pornography--both top and bottom--is the same as the identification in romance. The dichotomies represented by the main characters are the same. Does this mean that romances are pornographic?

Unfortunately that issue cannot be resolved. If one grants that the defining feature of pornography is not sexual explicitness but rather the power relationships implied, a debatable move in itself, then the answer to the above question depends entirely on whether or not the person answering it believes that a past imbalance of power can change and become a present balance of power. It would also depend on whether or not the questioner thought that the desire to assimilate the qualities of an other was a symptom of love or of hate. The repeated qualifier that romance readers are aware that they are reading fantasies, something divorced from what they would wish for in real life, must be once again brought forward. If the phallic male is not chosen as a mate in real life, but is chosen as a hero in fantasy (Malek, "Mad, Bad and Dangerous", 79), what does this mean? Perhaps it elucidates the point that one of the appeals of fantasy is that it can be riskier than real life.

It is difficult to assimilate an ideology with desire. Kaplan's insistence on seeing an individual's erotic tendencies as manifestations of a "perverse strategy", that things are never what they seem, is in itself an ideology. Having qualified Kaplan's accusations in such a manner, it must be admitted that it is perfectly possible that some people will perceive romances as pornographic--critics who believe that adult

sexuality is a reworking of infantile traumas and anxieties, or those who feel that in a fundamentally patriarchal society, an egalitarian heterosexual relationship cannot exist.

The critics must themselves evaluate their fear--why does Kaplan apparently feel that any heterosexual relationship is doomed to mask power imbalances and hate? She dismisses attempts at a female erotica:

> However, the Kensingston ladies who thought they could create democratic sexual turn-ons that had no victims, no oppressors, no injustice and no violence ended up with a pallid good-girl feminine erotica that is hardly any turn-on at all (354).

Is there no solution? Krentz and Kaplan approach the same problem from opposite ends. One claims that romance has nothing to do with the real world, and the other claims it has everything to do with it. Neither of them are particularly convincing. Perhaps, as Jean Radford suggests, the truth is closer to the middle. She feels that romances are politically complex because they refer to both the "real" and "ideal" worlds (Introduction 12). She also feels that because of this dual reference, romances are not directed at a "unified feminine reading subject" but rather at a divided one (Introduction 16). This suggestion is enlightening when many of the topics covered in historical romances, such as prostitution, illegitimate children, contraceptive difficulties, and the legal restrictions of women, are considered. Surely if romances only appeal to anaesthetising fantasies these topics could be wholly avoided. Therefore, Radford argues, any regression in the romance is not a positive or negative artefact in the text itself, but becomes so through the social contract, the critical interpretation, which contextualises it. (Introduction 17).

Why can erotic literature not successfully embody and demonstrate the hypothesis which according to the femmellettes and families theory, developing males cannot accept: that differences can be equal? In other words, why can there not be a celebration of different qualities without the assumption that one is better than the other? Why can they not be complementary?

Perhaps part of the confusion regarding the degree of ideological correctness of romance sexuality is engendered by the fact that, as Jessica Benjamin notes: "The relationship of domination is fuelled by the same desire for recognition that we find in love" (62). If this is true, and it seems plausible, then the Alpha male merely wishes to be recognised, just as the heroine does.

> The odd, melancholy tone in his voice nearly broke Annie's heart. She suddenly understood that Oliver knew only too well that the members of his own family, the family he had struggled so hard to protect, frequently kept things from him, out of fear of his reaction. He knew it and hated it. But he was helpless to figure out how to make the people he cared about trust him with their secrets. He had isolated himself emotionally and he had no clue how to break through the self-imposed barriers (Krentz, Wildest Hearts, 117).

Angela Carter notes of Jane Eyre that in her demands for a reciprocated love, and in the fact that she "specifies love as a precondition of existence" (Expletives Deleted 167), she is "yearning for a kind of signification that experience rarely, if ever, provides" (ibid., 168). It should be self-evident that this is one of the main aspects of the romances as fantasy; it offers a heightened experience that can nevertheless be related to the real world.

Many feminist theorists see male sexuality as defined by the phallus and therefore limited in both shape and scope. In "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine," Ann Rosalind Jones makes such comments as: "Irigaray locates woman's sexuality in the totality of the female body" (84) and: "Kristeva sees maternity as a conceptual challenge to phallogocentrism--gestation and nurturance break down the oppositions between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside" (86). Why then can it not be accepted that in the romance world, sexual union can also represent the same transcendence of self? Furthermore, Hélène Cixous is often quoted (i.e., Jones 88 and Toril Moi 114) as linking milk and ink, saying that writing is a natural metaphor for a woman, an idea strengthened by Kristeva's concept of the text as woven out of others, of intertexuality. "The text easily secretes other versions of itself," says Carter of the paradigmatic Jane Eyre (Expletives Deleted 162). Romances are deeply intertextual; not just with popular culture images and

specific canonised literature, but also with themselves. Does this mean they are, as Krentz claims, a unique form of female writing?

"You've got to see my body full of charms" [7]

One of the greatest gaps in the romance's treatment of sexuality is the taboo of masturbation. Granted, romances are concerned with the formation of a pair-bond, so masturbation would probably not be considered by readers as a desirable element to include in the text; however, the heroine's complete inexperience may be problematic, presenting not only a physical and emotional, but even a cognitive barrier. This is highlighted by a passage in Jo Beverley's Dark Champion:

> "I don't know where it goes."
>
> He closed his eyes briefly. "You don't know your own body?" He took her right hand and placed it between her thighs. "Slide your fingers back. You'll find the place."
>
> She slid her fingers back through what felt like cream, and paused. "Oh, it feels almost as sweet as when you touch me there!"
>
> "Remember that if I'm away."
>
> One of Father Wulfgan's more mysterious warnings finally made sense. "But that's a terrible sin!"
>
> "But one you're least likely to get caught at" (315).

According to John DeLamater masturbation serves two functions: it provides one with direct experience with sexual arousal and gratification and gives the idea that arousal and gratification are under the control of the individual (129). Even though sexual tension permeates the romance text, sexuality itself is for the heroine a discrete entity, rather like a box of chocolates that she only opens for the hero. This makes one think of Kaplan's thesis that the fundamental pornographic fantasy is that "decent women are virginal and lacking in desire until they are awakened, seduced,

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[7] A reference to the song "Sheela-na-gig" by Polly Harvey. The lyrics seem to begin: "I've been trying to tell you, over and over/Look at these my child-bearing hips/Look at these my ruby red ruby lips/You've got to feel my work-strong arms and/You've got to see my body full of charms//I lay it all at your feet/You turn around and say back to me/He says: Sheela-na-gig, Sheela-na-gig--you exhibitionist!" Harvey feels that much female-produced popular culture today is misandrogenic and so refuses to allow her lyrics to be printed, as her protest against this trend. A sheela-na-gig is an Irish fertility figure of a woman displaying her vulva, often found carved on old church lintels. PJ Harvey. "Sheela-na-gig." By Polly Harvey. On Dry. Indigo/too pure, 162.555 501.2, 1992.

bludgeoned, or raped into it" (349) [8]. In romances, the heroine's complete lack of knowledge of her own body is part of her virginity, which is quite a complex package.

Another aspect of romance sexuality is the absence of contraception. The heroine experiences very little respite between sexual initiation and motherhood. Her sexual life as a non-mother is therefore quite short, approximately one year. However, the historical pattern of prominent European societies during the period when most romances are set indicates that contraceptive knowledge, which it is assumed was passed down through women, was only revealed or used by women after the production of a few children [9]. Of course, the high value placed on fecundity, and the fact that romances focus on the very beginning of married life, perhaps keep contraception as a distant issue in the romance. It is very rare indeed for contraception to be used in historical romance novels [10], although it is often discussed in contemporary novels. In historicals, the hero, who is of course more knowledgeable about such things than the heroine, may discuss using contraception, but does not do so with the heroine.

In the romance, much female sexuality is determined by the male, whose presence encourages the heroine to explore her sexuality. He may also limit it, as seen by the typical hero's omission to use contraception. Although it is not a common issue in historicals, abortion is also a sexuality-related topic about which men have great say. Romances are rarely anti-abortion, but the heroine, with her faith in happily-ever-after, cannot bear to think about abortion as a personal alternative, when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. She never thinks of adoption, either. A few romances are openly anti-abortion, and a few are openly pro-choice,

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[8] While occasionally romance heroines may appreciate their own body, the only full masturbation scene I can remember reading in any romance is in the Harlequin Temptation #430 Michael's Wife by Tracy Morgan (February 1993).

[9] Angus McLaren, A History of Contraception From Antiquity to the Present Day (Oxford: Basil Blackford, 1990) 163, 167.

[10] There are only two examples from historicals in my corpus. In Roslynn Patrick's Princesse Royale, set in the Edwardian era, the heroine uses condoms, but only when having intercourse with her first lover (who is not the hero), and in Barbara Keller's Heartbreak Trail, the hero and heroine do take unspecified precautions, but they fail anyway, and she becomes pregnant.

but this issue is most likely dealt with in mainstream romances. It is interesting that promiscuous heros are far more likely to be anti-abortion than non-promiscuous heroes. Compare the attitudes to abortion in Judith McNaught's Paradise and Anne Maxwell's The Diamond Tiger, both with promiscuous heroes (the hero in Maxwell's story has slept with approximately 1 248 women, if his claims are to be believed), and Tangled Vines by Janet Dailey [11]. (Dailey's series romance novels show a much clearer dichotomy between male and female sexuality than her mainstream titles do.)

Peggy Phelan discusses the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue as an example of performance art, but she makes two points relevant to the romance. The first is that anti-abortionists focus on a part (the foetus) rather than on the interconnected whole (the pregnant woman). This makes it easy for them to ignore the question of the woman's rights (133). The romance's focus on the pregnant female and on child-bearing is used as a demonstration of female experience. Secondly, abortion has become an issue of paternity, of men wishing to bolster what they perceive as their flagging rights, when faced with women's (hopefully expanding) choice (138). This may explain why promiscuous heroes feel strongly anti-abortion; they have less practice at valuing women as individuals. Phelan demonstrates that the discourse on such highly-charged issues as abortion is most meaningful when the emotions generated are analysed, rather than evaluated. This coincides with my own theory that it is often difficult to assign an ideology to sexuality.

Even childbirth and pregnancy are subject to male influence in the romance. These motifs have come into textual prominence only recently; in the earliest erotic historicals, they were frequently glossed over as coyly as the sex itself. Birth particularly is presented as a heroic experience. In Morning Glory, the heroine labours for well over ten pages giving birth. Examples of the details given include, "Her genitals appeared inflamed, as if bee-stung, and they were seeping, staining the bedclothes a dim pink" (218), and "A ragged scream rent the air and Will learnt what

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[11] Judith McNaught. Paradise (New York: Pocket, 1991), Ann Maxwell. The Diamond Tiger (New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1992), and Janet Dailey. Tangled Vines (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

perineum meant as he watched Elly's tear" (219). The fact that Will assists at the birth gives him another chance to prove his heroic worth, but it is more usual to find the hero, if he is present at the birth, to be in the role of a spectator rather than a participant.

Pregnancy is not only the visible outward sign of having had intercourse, in the romance it implies that the hero's heir will be born, for the romance heroine would never betray her mate. Children whose mothers have distanced them from their fathers due to a misunderstanding are always reunited with them at the end of a text. Paternity, like maternity, implies a transcendental bonding with the offspring for the romance protagonist. Pregnancy itself is seen as an erotic condition. The physical condition of growing big and rounded is presented as pleasing, and there is an emphasis on the fact that the heroine is nurturing new life inside of her. "He smiled as he put his hand on her sweetly curved belly. He imagined his seed planted in her, growing even now, perhaps. The image was making him hard again" (Quick, Ravished, 235). As one childbirth expert writes, "Many men find the changing shape of a woman's body, and the presence of life which they have helped to make inside it, stimulating and beautiful" (Kitzinger 77). A presentation of parenthood which stresses the importance of both parents may be seen by some theorists as regressive, but the aesthetic appreciation of pregnancy would probably alienate some who hold traditional views. One thinks of the Vanity Fair cover of a pregnant nude Demi Moore and all the controversy that generated.

While reading articles on female sexuality, I noticed that those written by medical doctors [12] tended to stress the pain, shock and tearing involved in childbirth. In opposition, Sheila Kitzinger's The Experience of Childbirth makes the whole process sound rewarding and uplifting. Kitzinger further rationalises the tendency towards mythological overtones found in romances, by stating that during pregnancy, "to some women annunciation, incarnation, seem to become facts of their own

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[12] See for example Cori Baill and John Money, "Physiological Aspects of Female Sexual Development: Gestation, Lactation, Menopause, and Erotic Physiology," Women's Sexual Development: Explorations of Inner Space, Martha Kirkpatrick, ed. (New York: Plenum, 1980) 63.

existence" (25). She discusses "Zeus envy" (72), that is, a man's jealousy of the woman's ability to bear children (Zeus swallowed his pregnant wife so that he could give birth to the child). Benjamin would agree with Kitzinger: "Male envy of woman's fecundity and ability to produce food is certainly not unknown, but little is made of it" (163). The romance hero's attitude towards his mate's reproductive capabilities, which is possessive yet proud, falls fortuitously in the middle of the poles represented by complete disinterest and a fanatical need to control all aspects of his mate's sexual life.

This finely-balanced attitude of the romance hero must be extended to the topics of lactation and menstruation, both of which involve fluids specific to women. In Jo Beverley's My Lady Notorious, the hero "wondered what it would be like to watch the mother of his child feed the babe, what it would be like to suck on nipples which produced milk" (75). Romance heroes are never disgusted by breastfeeding, but are fascinated by it, and by the merging of maternity with sexuality. Kitzinger bluntly states that breastfeeding is "a central fact of mothering without which the human race would never have survived" (83), but in our society, breast-feeding is something of a taboo; to quote a PJ Harvey song, "He said: 'Wash your breasts. I don't want to be unclean'" [13].

Even Lacan would agree that desire is fluid (Gallop, Daughter's Seduction 41). In Sweet Sensations by Julie Tetel that conceit is expanded to such an extent that femininity itself is defined in terms of fluidity:

> Barbara was relieved, in turn, to be drained of at least some of the fluids filling her. As Sarah sucked and drank, Barbara's relief shaded into contentment to be holding her dear, dear daughter. That mood slid into happiness, then joy, then a kind of sisterly sadness for Mrs. Ross and her emptiness, then a moment of blessedness at the thought that Sarah's life had enriched hers [...] More fluid came to prick at the corners of her eyes.
>
> She felt like a wet mess of milk and blood and tears [...] suddenly conscious that the baby at her breast was a solid, obscene symbol of her sex and her body's desire (104).

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[13] Harvey, "Sheela-na-gig."

The heroine's epiphany, her realisation of love, is also defined in fluid terms:

> And now she loved. She loved her daughter more than her life, and she no longer had any defenses to ward off the painful effects of that love. She considered trading that soft, liquid mother's love for the safe, cold place where she had lived most of her life [...]
>
> Then she looked at Morgan, and he looked at her [...]
>
> Bathing in the warm, loving light of Morgan's eyes, she felt the marble shrine of pride and arrogance behind her heart dissolve in the wash of her emotions (256-7).

The gaze of the hero, characterised as phallic by Ann Barr Snitow (152), and seen as scopophilic, typically male, in many feminist readings of texts (see Moi 134-5), is here fluid, because the spectrum of emotions shading into love (which includes sisterly feelings), is fluid. The very identity of woman is fluid, merging with her baby and her husband.

Women are related to more fluids than men; in romance code the only fluid associated with men is semen [14], and it only appears in conjunction with the female body. However, as Irigaray notes, while virgin blood can be portrayed in literature (and it is very important in erotic historical romances), menstrual blood is taboo (Gallop, Daughter's Seduction 83), although both menstrual and hymenal blood used to be considered magical (Freud, "Taboo of Virginity" 198). In Sweet Sensations the hero thinks, "Now, if that isn't the epitome of marriage, sleeping with a woman during her courses!" (113) presumably because he thinks she will not or should not be sexually receptive while menstruating.

Menarche, defloration, parturition and menopause were considered by Hélène Deutsch to be the key events in a woman's life that elicited her naturally masochistic leanings (Robin Morgan 67). Neither the first nor the last of these motifs are dealt with in the romance. In fact, menarche is rarely treated in fiction at all. Perhaps this relates back to the taboo regarding menstrual blood; like defloration, menarche is an initiation involving blood, but it occurs independent of males. It has also been

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[14] In the three series romances which, in Figure 1.1, were identified as not likely to have an Alpha male hero, the man can sometimes shed a tear or two, but he never weeps openly. In other romances, it is extremely unusual to find the hero crying at all.

suggested to me that there is a taboo in our society against adults exploring adolescent sexuality.

However, it is more likely that the omission of certain sexual motifs has to do with the commonly accepted division of a woman's life into three sections: virgin, mother, crone. Romances tend to deal only with the "prime time" of a female's life, the transition from virgin to mother. A woman entering menopause is much older than the average romance heroine, and rather than entering into her reproductive years, she is exiting them. Therefore this topic, until very recently rarely discussed anywhere, is excluded from the romance by chronology.

"Put money in your idol hole" [15]

In the romance textual world, the most despised of creatures is often the "Sadean whore", that is, one who is promiscuous for pleasure, who lures with false protestations of love. As Radway noted, in romances, bad women are held responsible for creating "bad" (phallic, self-contained) men (128). Frequently, this woman or the men associated with her interfere in the plot of the romance, and it used to be rare to find anyone in the textual world expressing anything but disdain for her. Since heroes are becoming less promiscuous, however, such sexual proclivities are being interpreted in the light of a psychological disturbance, as in Amanda Quick's Seduction.

One particularly female aspect of sexuality as presented in the romance world is Fear of the Father. Robin Morgan states that one of the theories developed to explain why women indulge in masochistic fantasies, where they fantasise the condition of powerlessness, is longing for the absent father figure (67). In the romance, the father figure is usually absent (or at the very least absent-minded; think of Mr. Bennett), and is often cruel or abusive when present. It becomes abundantly

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[15] Harvey, "Sheela-na-gig." Since the lyrics are not written out, there are several possible ways to spell this phrase, none of which is "wrong".

clear that the only possible focus of the heroine's desire is in fact the hero. In My Lady Notorious by Jo Beverley, the father orchestrates a "rape" in order to discredit/discard his wilful daughter. This stems from the frustration/revenge of the phallic father, (who is a Puritan, obsessed with law and order) against the boundaryless, "freak" female. To punish the daughter for disobeying him, he shaves her head, but even though she is now an outcast as a female, she dresses as a male, and it is in this state of dual sexual ambiguity (what gender is she, and is she innocent or not?) that she meets the hero. Being self-perceived as a freak makes the heroine bitter--she cannot escape her father, since she cannot escape the verdict of the name he gave her, "Chastity". The only one who can offer her freedom both from her chastity and her father is the hero. After the father's death, the circumscribed field of her life gets even broader, as she and the hero emigrate to Canada. And she gets a new father in the figure of her brother-in-law, who insists that she follow, not the edicts of a hypocritical society, but the morality of her inclinations (her love for the hero).

It is not uncommon in romance for the hero and the father to be represented as dual poles of the heroine's existence. In Julie Tetel's Swept Away, the basis of the plot is a political intrigue in which the hero accuses the heroine's father, whom she believes always behaves with the utmost moral rectitude, of treason. When the heroine discovers that the hero's accusation was true, her entire world-view must shift to accommodate the dissolution of her previous rules of conduct. In No Sweeter Heaven, the father is a rigid doctrinaire Catholic who punishes his wife for an imagined lapse of virtue by denying her access to her children. The heroine considers herself an atheist until the literally saintly hero manages to produce an epiphany for her. In Mary Jo Putney's Silk and Shadows, the heroine's father is willing to sell his daughter to a known brothel-keeper because the man allows him to indulge his sado-masochistic tendencies in one of his houses. The hero, who as a boy was sexually molested by the villain, confronts the father and marries the heroine himself.

"Happily ever after?"

This exploration of romance sexuality is far from complete. It is not just the actions described in romance, but also the manner in which they are described, that adds up to "sexual tension".

Female sexuality is usually focussed on an active quest, since the heroine tries to transform cynicism and indifference into love. The hero usually responds in one of three ways: he can try to uphold the status quo through cynicism, like Amanda Quick's heroes; he can believe himself defeated and unworthy of love (Shadowplay); or he can get swept along in the heroine's quest to make sense of her world (My Lady Notorious, Swept Away).

Freud noted of psycho-analysis that the aim is to take the manifest back to the hidden ("Universal Tendency to Debasement" 187). The same is true both of my analysis, and of romance sexuality, which espouses possibly outdated paradigms, and uses a highly coded, extremely emotional language to explore and perhaps exploit some of the female fascination both with dominant and submissive sexualities. Romance has been called conservative by some critics and revolutionary by others. As Freud explains of his own genre of texts:

> It [psycho-analysis] is quite satisfied if reforms make use of its findings to replace what is injurious by something more advantageous, but it cannot predict whether other institutions may not result in other, and perhaps graver, sacrifices (187).

It would seem to be a great pity if heterosexual relations were to be abandoned as being impossible to carry on in an entirely egalitarian manner, especially as the romance paradigm does bring its readers joy, if only in fantasy.

But what of the gap in the text which was promised at the end of the preceeding chapter? Despite all the psycho-analysis, biological references, and mythological overtones, it still transpires that the view of sexuality presented in the romance is not one with which some of the creators of the textual worlds are entirely satisfied. In some texts, the predominant emotion, rather than sexual tension, is

anger. The development of this emotion, and the methods by which it is diffused, will be demonstrated in the analysis of paradigmatic romances, focussing on Amanda Quick's novels. This analysis occupies the next two chapters.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## DEEP-SEATED PROBLEMS:

## the morphology of the romance plot

Mrs Rose Cottage's eldest, Mae, peels off her pink-and-white skin in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood and waits there raw as an onion for Mister Right to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout.

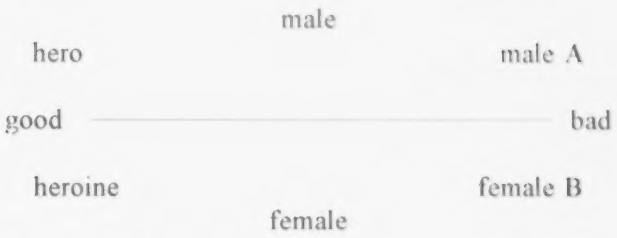
Dylan Thomas

C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée.

Jean Racine

By now it should be obvious that the romance, which thrives on tension between the protagonists, most often generates that tension by formulating dichotomies. Males have one set of values associated with them, and therefore a specific set of characteristics and actions are generated. The same is true for females, and the disparity in the treatment of the genders drives the plot forward to the equilibrium sought at the end of the text. Besides the values enshrined in the characters and social positions of the protagonists, the villains are essential for moving the plot forward. Most romances have at least two "bad" people; one male and one female. A possible schema follows:

Figure 4.1 Schema of romance characters




Female B is often the "bad woman", perhaps a former wife, who has given the hero reason not to trust females. However, she can also be someone who wishes to harm the heroine. In any case, she serves as a contrast to her. Male A serves first as a barrier to the developing relationship (was he her lover or not?) and then as a facilitator, once he jeopardises the heroine's safety, and so forces the hero to act. The heroine is usually too innocent to realise the danger posed by male A, and her naiveté may be misinterpreted by the hero, or may force him to overreact in a possessive manner. Therefore these "bad" figures generate both danger and sexual tension for the protagonists.

All the main characters in the plot are neatly integrated also. If one thinks of those arguments occurring between the protagonists as incidents internal to the pair-bond, and those adventures which involve confronting antagonists as external to the pair-bond, the fact that the villains are often linked with those past events which formed the hero or heroine's character means that both internal and external events become part of one pattern. For example, if a husband/hero tries to control the second wife/heroine because his first wife/female B was faithless, the heroine will protest. But if the lover/male A of the first wife has gone mad and therefore attempts to harm the heroine in order to hurt the hero, the textual past informs the textual present, and the internal argument between the protagonists regarding trustworthiness is also relevant to the external incident involving the male villain. There can be more

than one villain, although the number of women in the hero's past is usually limited; wildly promiscuous heroes are no longer very popular.

There are also certain plot patterns which appear again and again in both literary romances, and in genre romances. Early familial relations, as Angela Carter noted of Jane Eyre, are often dysfunctional (Expletives Deleted 166), leaving the hero and/or heroine isolated. Hidden identities abound, not just in the case of the bad characters. Children who are estranged from their family may find their place taken by a usurper (Fanny Burney uses this plot in Evelina); a hero may have a secret identity, not just an academic moonlighting as a spycatcher, but keeping his true persona as the hidden one (as in The Scarlet Pimpernel). Krentz's assertion that the hero plays a dual role ("Trying to Tame" 108) is true, but the hero is rarely the villain in the sense of the character lurking around with a hidden knife who wishes to harm the heroine. It is merely that he must combine domesticity with excitement; it is easier to do this with a split persona than it is to combine the two.

"Out of the text"

In order to demonstrate how the historical romance embodies interferences from more systems than the non-hybrid or "straight" contemporary category romances, analyses of the interests and tensions revealed in examples of both types of novels are offered below.

The category chosen for analysis is from the highly entropic Harlequin Presents line, which has not significantly altered since its debut in 1973, except for the fact that sexual relationships are now often consummated in the texts. The author, Penny Jordan, is one of the line's most prolific and popular writers, writing between eight and ten Presents a year; she has also written several longer "mainstream" novels for Harlequin's Worldwide logo. Like most Presents and Romance writers, she is English, and her novels are first published by Mills and Boon before being republished by Harlequin.

Out of the Night (Harlequin Presents #1427, January 1992; Mills and Boon Romance, 1990), is one of the most barebones presentation of the Archytypal Romance Myth I have ever encountered. There is such a paucity of content within the text that it is only by looking outside the text, to the entire romance network, that the reader can gain some understanding of the book's intended appeal. The plot is as follows:

The 26-year old virgin heroine is stranded with a stranger in a snowstorm. They have sex. She lies about her name and leaves. He reappears in her life unexpectedly. She agonises. He agonises. Through a series of misunderstandings, they wind up together, married, with twin babies on the way. End of story.

The points of view of both heroine and hero are presented in the narrative, and it appears that despite his job as an Oxford don, Matt, like Emily, thinks only of his love life. Neither of them are capable of any reasoning beyond vicious little circles; they are both convinced that their love is unrequited.

The heroine is a loner and misfit who does not fit in with the rest of her family. She was betrayed by a man who she thought loved her, but who only wanted to deflower her to win a bet, so she lives with an elderly professor uncle, and acts as his research assistant. The reader learns this in the first seven pages; in short series romances, the protagonists' interaction must happen as quickly as possible. The hero has a successful career, but does not trust women because thirteen years ago his fiancée betrayed him sexually, and then revealed she only wanted to marry him for his money, anyway. When he first meets the heroine, he thinks, "She looked so young and innocent as she slept. His mouth tightened. As he had good cause to know, her sex was adept at promoting fictitious images" (24).

After their night of passion, both protagonists think the same things, and their actions completely belie their thoughts.

> It was all right for him, she told herself bitterly. He was a man, no doubt accustomed to these casual, meaningless encounters. Silently lashing herself with twin whips of guilt and self-contempt [...] Last night, in his arms, she had felt as though they were two halves of a perfect whole. This morning...this morning

> she couldn't understand the fever which had driven her into those arms in the first place [...]
>
> As he watched her, Matt wished he knew what to say; last night she had been so warm, so eager...This morning she was so cold and withdrawn [...] He cursed himself for his weakness in wanting to establish some sort of emotional bonding with her. Traditionally it was women who wanted and needed more from a man than the physical pleasure of his body (53-4).

The heroine is constricted, not by social decorum, as her counterparts in historicals are, but by the subtler pressures of guilt and self-contempt (i.e., how a woman should behave). The hero thinks of traditional sex roles (i.e., how a man should behave). Since both of them overstep the shoulds, the woman in being sexually reckless and the man in desiring commitment, it could be argued that this romance does embody a subversive content. However, this argument would only hold true if the speaker believed that men and women are constricted by these social forces.

The heroine acts in a contradictory manner because her fantasy is contradictory. In the opening pages of the novel, "her dreams did not have wide horizons. It was the small, intimate world of domestic happiness she craved: a home, husband, children--love that could be shared" (7). After meeting the hero in a dangerous situation:

> It was ironic to remember that once she had day-dreamed about just such an encounter, just such a stranger coming into her life and stirring her to immediate and reckless need and desire. Then it had seemed an idyllic romantic daydream; a thrilling fantasy of instant mutual awareness and responsiveness. Now she was actually faced with the reality (36).

During the actual love-making, there is no such censorship at work: desire, as I have suggested in Chapter Three, transcends a power or morality-based ideology:

> What she was experiencing went far beyond right or wrong, far, far, beyond worrying about doing the right thing...about defending herself from hurt and pain. This need they were sharing was so elemental, so fierce, so overpowering that it cut across every layer of civilisation, laying bare the deepest essences of their humanity (45-6).

As for the hero, "Why did he persist in feeling as though last night had been something special and precious, a gift for him alone?" (55). The romance relationship

transcends the individuals partly because, within the context of the textual world, it is predestined. This predestination is signalled by certain events which have been discussed before, such as the hero becoming the point of entrance of the outside world into the heroine's domestic sphere, and therefore becoming the locus of the heroine's fantasies. One of these events is the heroine's loss of virginity:

> He was frowning as he walked into his room, recalling the small, betraying stain he had found on his sleeping-bag. It had stunned him with disbelief at first, reinforcing his own crazy feeling that what had happened between them was no casual, meaningless encounter, but something special...something rare...something almost predestined (77).

Kismet, it appears, has certain material indicators. It goes almost without saying, within the Presents context, that Matt is very wealthy. It would be a relief for romance readers of a certain political inclination to state that the treatment of wealth in romance is akin to the treatment of female beauty. As Kathleen Gilles Seidel points out, in the romance, beauty is often "a label" (163). Although the hero finds the heroine physically attractive, others do not seem to comment much on her appearance. Because a woman's appearance is such a complex issue in our society, "The fantasy, I believe, is not to be beautiful but to have an identity for yourself that is not caught up in your appearance" (164). However, the magnetism of the male, like his wealth, must be apparent to others besides the heroine. This issue will be returned to later.

One last point regarding gender roles: Jordan's heroine makes a plea for domesticity to be regarded as a viable choice; in this, she is going against the grain of much contemporary Western thinking, where work outside the home is the only kind valued, as it is usually the only kind that is remunerated. Economist Marilyn Waring demonstrates that the male and female worlds would be brought into a closer alignment if economists were more willing to acknowledge all kinds of work, not just those which are "upwardly mobile". By the same reasoning, the feminist movement could also stage a rapprochement with those holding traditional views. However, as in most aspects of the romance text, the prevailing ideology has invaded the novels:

in Amanda Quick's historical romances, set in the Regency era, the heroines seek occupation outside the women's sphere of their times, regardless of the anachronism this presents.

The concept of transcendant love is strengthened by the number of times which fate is named as the force responsible for bringing together these two people. "Why did fate have to intervene so unkindly in her life" (85) the heroine wonders. However, the protagonists are not merely passive agents; fortuitously, fate coincides with their personal will. As the hero explains to the heroine:

> I tried to trace you, through your car [...] I hadn't given up, though, Emily, I promise you that [...] and I would have found you, too, if fate hadn't decided to intervene. She obviously didn't have a very high opinion of either of us, did she? (187).

In case the reader is tempted to scoff at this fabulous love story, the text self-inoculates against disbelief. Again, the thoughts of the heroine and hero parallel each other; if this is a reliable indication of suitability, they are well matched. "[S]he had quite simply fallen instantly and deeply in love with the man. And that, of course, was impossible. Wasn't it? Of course it was. It had to be" (127). The hero thinks, "Such things simply did not happen...Only they had" (143). The author has her protagonists voice a disbelief in the romance myth. Yet the romance reader is secure in her foreknowledge of the happy ending, the confirmation of the myth. The disbelief voiced can therefore be assessed and rejected by the reader, strengthening her belief in the myth. However, despite fate, uncertainty on the part of the main characters regarding the outcome of their intrigue persists until the words are spoken. There are often two denouements in the romance novel (see Cameron in Krentz 141-2); the first one when the heroine or hero, or both, begin to hope that their affection is returned, and the second when the actual declaration of affection is made. It is not so odd that the words are so important when one considers that novels, are, after all, a verbal medium. The importance of speech is underlined by the advice often given to beginning romance writers at industry workshops to make sure that their action scenes contain a minimum of sixty percent dialogue.

The plot of Out of the Night is implausible and the development of the relationship strains credulity at every turn. Why would this book be read? As the heroine explains, "she had started to build up a store of fantasy, of 'maybe's', of impossible dreams, all the more comforting because they were impossible" (90, my emphasis). In historical romances, the very setting precludes any possibility of the reader mirroring the heroine's existence, and yet currently these novels are some of the best selling romance books published (Seidel 168). Clearly impossible dreams still have appeal.

"To wish impossible things"

Jordan states outright the conflicting aspects of the romance fantasy: the ravishment, which often involves a "rape" in the ancient sense of the word, of carrying the woman off, transgressing the laws of hospitality, versus domesticity, reliability and security. Although Kaplan claimed that the phallic male was softened into domestic custard in the course of the novel, in Emily's mind, they co-exist. The logical assumption she makes, that a male cannot be domestic and phallic at the same time, causes her to misconstrue the actions of the hero throughout much of the text (just as he misconstrues hers). This is part of the self-inoculating effect of the novel; it embodies criticism of the romance fantasy in order to engulf it, swallow it and prove it untrue, with the conclusion of the text. It is the same technique as Kaplan accuses the romance heroine of using, with regards to the hero's hardness. The gulf that yawns at the beginning of the text makes way to engulfment by the end.

Quick's heroines also want to attempt the (same) impossible: they want to reintegrate the hero with his feelings (which of course means integrating him with the heroine). Marriage, as Tony Tanner elucidates, is a way of organising the personal microcosm in a contract, not just with another, but with society. However, he feels that the "bourgeois" novel (which to him is apparently limited to the nineteenth century, at least as a primary literary system) is drawn not as much toward that

organising signifier, the marriage, as it is towards the cracks, strains and stresses that may manifest themselves in the transgression of adultery (371). It could be argued that this constant preoccupation with pair-bonding in the form of marriage is further instance of the romance myth's paucity. Conversely, it could be argued that this preoccupation is indicative of the limited number of basic human concerns, one of the most imperative of which is the need to be loved.

Adultery is an impossible triangle: wife, mother and lover do not seem to go together. However, they do in adulterous novels and they do in the romance. Perhaps this is a further element that can be used to elucidate the importance of virginity in the romance. Virginity is, in the eyes of the writers, the readers and often the heroines, many of whom, it may be supposed, have more-or-less current perspectives on gender inequalities [1], one of the most intangible but important signs of the inequality that exists in the beginning. It becomes, by extension, a symbol of the whole realms of experience denied to women. If the woman cannot come to terms with the far-reaching pressures of society, she will not be able to accept the more specific pressures of the marriage contract. It is difficult enough, both in terms of persuading the male to accept the societal contract, and in terms of resigning herself to the limitations of that contract, for the heroine to get married; the novel rarely lingers long enough to examine cracks which might later develop in the contract. (All of the novels discussed in detail by Tanner are by males; only one of the synopses deal with a novel by a female, The Mill on the Floss.)

The motif of virginity tends to be less problematic for both heroine and reader when the novels are highly ludic, where sexuality is treated as a game with distinct rules. See for example the billiard seduction scene in Putney's Thunder and Roses. Such an atmosphere tends to obfuscate the possibly negative aspects of sexuality, as well as levelling the balance of power; in billiards, either hero or heroine can win.

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[1] The writers as demonstrated in Krentz's anthology, the readers as demonstrated by Thurston's survey, and the heroines as demonstrated by the texts. Doubtless there are notable exceptions in every group (for example, Barbara Cartland among writers), but they are, I believe, a minority.

The romance reader, in order to successfully identify with the hero, must be able either to clearly see his heroic qualities, or to argue with him, through the medium of the heroine, until those qualities can stand forth as both sexual satisfaction and domesticity. The romance hero is often defined in terms of his social status; everything is cognate with his superior sexuality.

"good Quick reads"

Writing as Quick, Krentz produces approximately two dress historicals a year; as with many romance writers, the formula she uses is remarkably constant. In fact, among seven of her novels, individual variations are so slight that even a faithful reader admitted she could not keep them separate in her mind. Although she began as a series writer, currently she is a best-selling author of both contemporary and futuristic mainstream romances (under the name Krentz), as well as historicals. Publications such as Romantic Times are lavish in their praise of her work, and her consistently high sales are attested to by the fact that she has at least two hard cover novels currently available, a rare kudo for a romance author. A summary of current soft-cover Amanda Quick regency novels follows. (Desire, a medieval, has just been published (January 1994), and Deception (1993) is available in hard cover only.)

Figure 4.2 Summary of Amanda Quick novels

| | |
|---|---|
| Seduction<br>(March 1990) | Heroine: Sophy Dorring, amateur herbalist. Also trying to find identity of sister's seducer<br>Hero: Julian, Earl of Ravenwood ($)<br>Male A: Waycott, seducer of Sophy's sister and lover of...<br>Female B: Elizabeth, Julian's dead wife<br>Initial Meeting: hero looking for biddable wife; heroine secretly remembers him from before<br>Baby: male heir |
| Surrender<br>(October 1990) | Heroine: Victoria Huntingdon, botanical illustrator and adventurer ($) |

Hero: Lucas, Earl of Stonevale
Male A: "ghost" of Whitlock, heroine's abusive stepfather, and Edgeworth, both lovers of...
Female B: Isabel Rycott
Initial Meeting: landowning hero needs wealthy wife
Baby: male heir

Scandal
(March 1991)

Heroine: Emily Faringdon, bad poet and financial genius
Hero: Simon, Earl of Blade ($)
Male A: heroine's father, who betrayed hero's father and heroine
Female B: "Unfortunate Incident" in heroine's past (i.e., she plays both roles)
Initial Meeting: hero seeks revenge on heroine's father
Baby: none

Rendezvous
(November 1991)

Heroine: Augusta Ballinger, female Tulip of Fashion
Hero: Harry, Earl of Graystone, classical scholar and spy ($) (described as "chillingly pompous" on back cover)
Male A: Lovejoy, traitor and enemy of hero
Female B: heroine's hero worship of dead brother Richard (i.e., she plays both roles)
Initial Meeting: hero needs suitable wife
Baby: male heir

Ravished
(July 1992)

Heroine: Harriet Pomeroy, fossilist
Hero: Gideon, Viscount St. Justin (son of Earl of Hardcastle) ($)
Male A: Morland, lover of Deidre Rushton and Rev. Rushton, father of...
Female B: Deidre Rushton, former fiancée of hero
Initial Meeting: heroine summons hero to help catch thieves in fossil caves
Baby: male heir

Reckless
(December 1992)

Heroine: Lady Phoebe Layton, book collector and publisher ($)
Hero: Gabriel, Earl of Wylde, poet (hidden $)

| | |
|---|---|
| | Male A: Kilbourne and Baxter, false pretendants to heroine's hand<br>Female B: Alice, deserted lover of Baxter<br>Initial Meeting: heroine summons hero to help her recover a manuscript; secretly remembers him from before<br>Baby: pregnant with "Arthur" |
| Dangerous<br>(May 1993) | Heroine: Prudence Merryweather, investigator of spectral phenomena<br>Hero: Sebastian, Earl of Angelstone, private investigator ($)<br>Male A: Jeremy, hero's estranged cousin, and Curling, debaucher and murderer of Jeremy's fiancée<br>Female B: Underbrink, false pretendant to heroine's hand (plays "jealous" female role) and Drucilla, Sebastian's Aunt<br>Initial Meeting: mutual interest in investigative techniques<br>Baby: pregnant |

There are several elements that must be underlined from the summary chart above. The first is that the original meeting between the two is always at the deliberate instigation of one of them; although they have to revise their original expectations, as Phoebe does in Reckless when she approaches Gabriel to be her knight-errant, in the end their original expectations are met and exceeded. The second is that the heroine almost always has an "occupation" that is her primary mean of defining herself. The possible exception is Augusta, depending on whether or not the reader feels that running a women's club modelled on men's clubs is an occupation. The heroine's absorption in her occupation comes about because she feels stifled by the mode of life into which society forces her. Following her occupation often gets her into trouble, which in turn furthers the plot, as when Harriet the fossilist disturbs a gang of smugglers in "her" caves. It is this discovery which prompts her to write to the landowner-hero. Therefore, there is already a tangible and a spiritual imbalance in the heroine's life at the beginning of the text. The third

comment is that in two texts, the heroine is also the "other woman", that is, past actions or attachments of hers drive the plot forward. This does not mean that she is the woman responsible for disillusioning the hero. In fact, not every hero has been disillusioned by women; in both Reckless and Scandal, the heroine's father is responsible for hardening the hero, and in the former text, the hero forgives his father-in-law.

In Radway's list of romance plot functions (134), she claims that in the initial situation the heroine's social identity is destroyed and that when she meets the hero, she interprets him as reacting to her with purely sexual interest. (Radway does not appear to believe that romance heroines have any innate identity.) Neither of these plot functions appear in the Quick novels. Furthermore, the heroine never loses her sense of self-identity; when she discovers that her initial assessment of the hero's character does not accord with his assessment of himself, as in Seduction and Scandal, she merely becomes more determined to pursue her own individual life:

> It did not promise to be the kind of marriage she had longed for but at least she was finally facing reality, Sophy decided. And, she reminded herself as she got to her feet, she had other things to do here in London [...] It was past time she gave her full attention to the matter of finding her sister's seducer (Seduction 193-4).

Radway makes no distinction between the hero's declaration of love and his demonstration of the same. In fact, there is a crucial difference. At the end of Surrender, the frustrated hero, who had just witnessed his wife nearly murdered by the bad woman in the plot, all because she could not let him face supposed danger alone, demands, "At least have the grace to admit you did it because you loved me [...] Say it, Vicky. After all I have been through tonight, I deserve to have the words at last" (356-7).

Radway's plot functions cannot be applied to today's historicals. However, she is correct in the assertion that a misunderstanding lies at the heart of nearly all romance novels. At its simplest, the misunderstanding is simply that the hero is unaware of his capacity to love; it can be tied up with subplots, or even with

seemingly inconsequential details (Victoria in Surrender believes that as an heiress she will only ever be married for money). Further contrary to Radway's plot schema, in many of today's romances, it is the heroine who first demonstrates her love, and not merely by swooning in the hero's presence; in Ravished, Harriet is the only member of society who defends Gideon's honour.

In Quick's novels, the main plot progresses from a lack (Harry needs a wife, Phoebe needs a knight-errant, Sebastian needs someone to converse with) that one protagonist feels can only be fulfilled by the other. The sub-plot, the one that affords the protagonists opportunity to enjoy shared adventures, always stems from villainy of some kind (usually the seduction of a faithless woman). The dichotomies between good and bad are vitally important not only to plot but to the definition of heroic traits (loyalty is one of the most highly prized heroic traits in the romance world).

The plot does not really get going until a pact has been reached between the protagonists, one which allows one to make a claim on the other. This lays the groundwork for the confrontations and struggles which develops the primary love relationship. The pact usually involves the hero extending himself to aid the heroine; therefore the heroine initially finds herself at a disadvantage. This allows for the romance atmosphere of risk to be developed. In Dangerous:

> "You and I are bound by a bargain now. And until I have collected the favor that you owe me, it is in my own best interests to keep you safe." He smiled again. "Have you not heard that the devil looks after his own?" (20).

Since the pact usually galvanises the villain into action (Waycott is enraged when Julian remarries in Seduction; Lovejoy tries to make Augusta's dead brother appear guilty of treason once she announces her engagement to Harry in Rendezvous) the pact is also a chance for the heroine to develop her heroic qualities.

In Dangerous, Sebastian's Aunt, who hates him not only because he was rumoured a bastard and she therefore supposed her own son should inherit, but also because she was in love with his father, publicly humiliates the heroine. At a ball immediately following the announcement of their engagement, she sarcastically labels

Prudence a "clever little ghost hunter," and then proceeds to "Original", "odd creature", "silly chit", "completely unsuitable female", and "little countrified nobody" (112-113). She ends by stating that Prudence will find herself abandoned within a fortnight.

> [Prudence] looked into Drucilla's tormented eyes and suddenly felt very sorry for her. The poor woman was only too well aware that she had overstepped the line.
>
> "I appreciate your concern about the family name," Prudence said quietly. "It is obvious you have worked hard to keep it as untarnished as possible under extremely difficult circumstances" (114).

Of course, the heroine must also develop her heroism vis-à-vis the hero. The admiration she makes him feel forces the hero to recognise the denied pull towards the heroic buried within him. In Reckless, Phoebe searches out a copy of Malory's Morte D'Arthur that Gabriel's father gave him for his tenth birthday, a volume he was forced to sell later on. The same day she finds it, she also discovers that Gabriel has hired a man to follow her and make sure she does not succumb to the blandishments of the villain. Her reaction is not enthusiastic:

> "It is a question of trust. Gabriel, you have made it clear that you do not yet love me. If you do not trust me, either, then we have nothing at all between us." [...]
> Here. This is for you." She shoved the package into his hands. Then she turned on her heel and walked toward the library door. [...]
>
> When [Gabriel] had finished peeling off the brown paper, he sat gazing at the familiar volume for a long time. It occured to him that this was the first gift Phoebe had ever given him. No, he thought. That was not true. The first gift had been the gift of herself. This was the second gift she had given him.
>
> To date, he had not given her anything of importance at all (278-79).

Phoebe's actions may not appear to be heroic in the derring-do sense of the word. However, even when she is hurt, she resists the temptation to hurt back which occurs in many non-heroic characters and people. That is not to imply that romance heroines are afraid of active heroism. They merely find it less effective than their preferred way of doing things. This is especially evident in Seduction.

The male hierarchical structure that fosters the gender polarity of the fictional world is protested by each of Quick's heroines both before and after marriage. Her heroines have occupations in which they are well-respected by their peers, male and female. This holds true both for the retiring country misses as well as for the society women. (Not all the heroines are stylish and elegant, but each has a defining "style"; the beautiful Victoria wears only yellows, while the plain Prudence has glasses and no fashion sense whatsoever; Phoebe limps and wears bright colours, and so on). These occupations give the heroines a chance to demonstrate their feistiness and their constriction within society's roles, at the same time as they further the plot. In order to track down a particularly rare book, Phoebe must arrange a midnight rendezvous with an eccentric collector; for protection, she applies to the hero, Gabriel. Victoria cannot resist Lucas's offer to secretly escort her to all the bastions of male society she wishes to visit. This affords opportunity to deflate the male mystique: as the hero comments, "the unfortunate truth is men don't do very edifying things when they get together late at night and start drinking" (79).

These heroines, trying as they are to escape the confines of the female world, are not in their prime time, certainly not as defined by their social world; instead they are considered slightly too old to be truly eligible. Therefore, they have already established their own views on life [2]. This is something all but Julian finds to be a point in their favour; they know their own mind, and consequently their capacity for loyalty is stronger than in a seventeen year old straight from the schoolroom.

The heroine's revolt from both her world and her husband takes the form of actions and words. Augusta, upon hearing that Harry was dissatisfied with his former wife, asks if the Earls of Graystone (his seat) were any more virtuous than their infamous countesses. While Harry admits they were not, he adds, "But one tends to notice a lack of virtue more in a woman than in a man" (166). Clearly there is a

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[2] According to pop psychology, by the early twenties, one's value system has "locked in", and will only be changed by a "significant emotional event". One must suppose that Quick's heroines operate in such a manner on their heroes. A module on "How Values are Formed" was distributed to me at a romance writers' workshop.

conscious elaboration of the double standards. In some of the later novels, Quick allows her hero to back down from such an adamant position; Gabriel considers that since virgins are not particularly any more trustworthy than any other women, who are no more trustworthy than men, "virginity would not be the chief criteria he would use when it came time to select a wife" (52). This avoids accusations of misogyny, although it could leave Gabriel open to charges of misanthropy. However, Phoebe is still a virgin. Quick therefore offers a neat compromise between the political correctness she abhors and the demands she feels the romance myth makes.

The basic plot functions in Quick's novels are categorised as below.

Figure 4.3 Plot functions of Quick's novels

A. Heroine and hero meet at the instigation of one of them. (Intrusion into the internal world of protagonists.)

B. Heroine and hero form a pact, usually to rectify the lack suffered by one of them.

C. First sexual interaction or intimation, to seal pact. (Initiated by the hero.)

D. Others notice and disapprove of the relationship of the protagonists. (Intrusion of the external world into the internal one.)

E. Heroine and hero do not have the same expectations of the pact; this leads to internal conflict. (Heroine is dissatisfied; hero is satisfied.)

F. Association of heroine and hero motivates the villain(s) (a figure from one or both of their pasts) to action; this leads to external conflict.

G. Internal and external scenes alternate. They must include, in any order:

G (i) heroine's declaration of love to hero;

G (ii) heroine's defloration by hero;

G (iii) marriage at the insistence of hero;

G (iv) hero's growing dissatisfaction with relationship due to heroine's continued unhappiness;

G (v) heroine and/or hero's safety threatened by villain(s).

This culminates in:

H. Death or banishment of prime villain(s), and:

I. Reciprocal declaration of love.

J. (Optional) The "baby" scene.

These functions can be repeated and the order occasionally changed: in Dangerous, Sebastian, who suffers from ennui, is overwhelmingly attracted to Prudence's optimism (Function A). Her brother notices and challenges Sebastian to a duel (Function D). Prudence asks Sebastian to apologise and avert the duel (Function A

again); they form a pact (Function B) and Function C follows naturally. The actual text starts with the second enactment of Function A, which heightens the reader's tension, as Sebastian has not yet been introduced to the reader.

"As we forgive those who trespass against us"

In the first published historical, Seduction, the problem of having a male and a female world is examined at much greater length. The hero, Julian, Earl of Ravenwood wants a wife to provide him with "[a]n heir and no trouble" (17). He chooses a relatively poor daughter of minor country gentry, thinking that as she is twenty-three and unmarried, "She would be a sensible, tractable sort of female" (1), and furthermore, that because of her age, she would be a "grateful wife [who] is, of course, a manageable wife" (27). Needless to say, he is entirely wrong.

Sophy is aware of the Earl's unflattering motives, but she agrees to marry him anyway. He is not well-known to her except by reputation; he represents the exciting outside world. Since her sister was seduced and abandoned by a man from this world, Sophy hopes to seek revenge using the social entrance her new husband gains her. However, she knows of Julian's first marriage, and has a memory of him from that time:

> "I did once have occasion to be grateful to his lordship," Sophy said wistfully. "That was the time he very gallantly stood up with me at one of the balls I attended during my season. I remember the event well. It was the only time I danced all evening. I doubt he even remembers. He kept looking over my shoulder the whole time to see who was dancing with his precious Elizabeth" (29).

His first wife was seductive, beautiful and notoriously unfaithful; as Sophy finds out in London, Elizabeth had an extensive acquaintance among rakish males, and was known by one as "entrancing", "dazzling", "Fascinating, mysterious, captivating" and "very dangerous" (237). Sophy herself likens Elizabeth to a succubus (237), and terms her "witchy" (14). This last is interesting, because Sophy is a herbalist, an occupation that could be considered witchy by some. Of course, she

only ever uses her herbal potions to cure people, never to harm them. Yet Sophy is most certainly not tractable. In fact, Julian is as deceived in his second wife as he was in his first; it is merely that instead of being unhappy, as he was when Elizabeth tried to exert the freedoms and powers of the male world, he is happy when he himself becomes feminised.

Sophy does not agree to become a bride without a struggle; she meets with Julian in order to bargain with him. She believes that if he respects her enough to marry her, he will keep his word when dealing with her. She wishes to control her own money, her own reading matter, not to be left behind on the country estates while her husband is in London, and not to be forced to perform her wifely duties until a suitable period (at least three months) has elapsed after marriage, since she has no desire to be "rushed into childbed" (19). In fact, she sees very few advantages in the married state, and agrees to marry only after Julian gives his word.

> "Be warned," Ravenwood said with soft menace. "A man's sense of honor might be inviolate when it comes to his gaming debts or his reputation as a sportsman but it means little when it comes to dealing with a woman" (22).

After marriage, he reneges on his word. At first, he decides he will claim his conjugal rights. Sophy, who is well aware that Julian's trip to London just before the wedding was for the purpose of saying goodbye to his current mistress, is angry at his attempt to betray his word.

> At the moment apparently she constituted a challenge because she was his wife and she was refusing him the privileges he considered rightfully his [...H]e would touch her the way he touched his little ballet dancer or actress or whatever she was (53).

While in her bedchamber, Julian also discovers a copy of Wollstonecraft's treatise and attributes Sophy's actions to the poisoning effect of her reading material. He accuses Wollstonecraft of being a prostitute; Sophy defends her:

> "She felt marriage was nothing but a cage for women. Once a woman marries she is at the mercy of her husband. She has no rights of her own.

> Miss Wollstonecraft had deep insight into the female situation and she felt something should be done about it. I happen to agree with her. You say you are curious about me, my lord. Well, you might learn something about my interests if you read that book" (57).

This is yet another aspect of the pre-marital agreement that Julian feels he can abrogate. He does so because "a proper wife obeys her husband" (91), i.e., lets herself be completely controlled by him. It will not have escaped the reader's notice that Sophy is possessed of a modern consciousness in many ways, while Julian appears to be holding to the Victorian division between chastity for mothers and whorishness for everyone else that often passes for a historical consciousness in modern minds. This also contributes to the romance reader's feeling that her heroine teaches the hero, that is, she raises his consciousness to a modern, anachronistic level. Romances adhere to the division between male and female worlds posited by Bernard, and they imply that the female world, based on kinship and closing in, rather than on the Levi-Strauss system of trading out, is the better of the two.

There is enough of a dialectic at work to further the troubled relationship between the married couple. Incidents from outside their partnership allow for situations in which Sophy's two governing values can be further demonstrated. She aspires to love, but she demands to be treated honourably, as an equal, and starts off by receiving neither. There is a subplot which manages to explore these concepts from both received female and male perspectives. It may not be surprising that this subplot involves a prostitute from Julian's past who attempts to blackmail Sophy.

Sophy is furious, not because of Julian's past association, but at the fact that "Julian had once taken the time to write love notes to a professional courtesan yet he could not be bothered to jot so much as a simple love poem to his new wife" (151). She also does not like the idea of being blackmailed so that Julian's letters do not appear in the courtesan's memoirs. She therefore challenges Charlotte Featherstone to a duel. The other woman accepts, but the duel is never fought. Instead a conversation takes place, with the courtesan telling her:

> "[W]e are here because your sense of honor demands satisfaction and because you think I share your concept of honor. An interesting proposition. I wonder, do you comprehend that this definition of honor we are employing is a man's definition?"
>
> "There does not appear to be any other definition of honor that commands respect," Sophy said [...]
>
> "I must take leave to tell you that just as no man's honor is worth rising at this hour, no man's love is worth taking any great risk over, either [...] The issues involved are your honor and your love." Charlotte smiled slightly. "I can accept that those are not trifling matters. They might, indeed, be worth a little blood" (176-7).

Clearly Charlotte, with her cynicism, is not heroine material. And yet, in solidarity, Sophy does send her the requested two hundred pounds, stating that her former clients "seem to have enjoyed the same sort of relationship with you that they have with the women they marry. Thus, they have an obligation to provide you with a pension" (193). Sophy, who is by now (quite understandably) disillusioned in her marriage, turns her energies to finding out the identity of the man who seduced, impregnated and abandoned her sister, forcing her to suicide.

At this juncture in the text, men seem to deserve all the censure heaped on them. However, Sophy's anger and display of pride galvanises Julian to demonstrate that he does think highly of her. He buys her a diamond bracelet (Charlotte was wearing very expensive earrings that he gave her), then, in a twist on a scene from Jane Eyre, approaches her when she is dressed as a fortune teller at a masquerade ball, and asks her how he can improve his fortune in love. Sophy runs true to form. She tells him, "Your fortune is in your own hands" (208), adding that most women do not declare their love to men incapable of appreciating the gift. She refuses the bracelet, labelling it a sop suitable for a mistress, who cannot afford pride.

There are at least three female worlds represented in the text. There is the world of the heroine, well-brought-up young women who must struggle to gain equality and love in marriage; women like Featherstone, who have unlimited access to men but are denied respectability; and a lesbian couple, who can largely ignore the male world and be happy doing so. Julian's Aunt Fanny (is the pun intentional on the part of the author?) lives with a woman named Harriette. The latter has already made

the outrageous observation (from a romance perspective) after reading the first installment of Charlotte's memoirs, that "perhaps men, in general, simply do not make interesting lovers" (106). She later asks Sophy: "How could a man and a woman possibly understand each other the way Fanny and I do?" (258). Sophy responds: "Perhaps complete understanding is not necessary if there is genuine love and mutual respect and a willingness to be tolerant" (ibid.). The bridge between the worlds is tenuous and difficult: many women do not try to bridge it, but a heroine will. Harriette then observes: "Marriage is a very risky venture for a woman" (259), and, in true romance style, Sophy replies: "Well, I have taken the risk. Somehow or other, I hope to find a way to make it work" (ibid.).

Seduction is an unusual romance novel, not only in that a courtesan is presented in a non-judgemental light (Charlotte is represented as acting out of a financial imperative, not from nymphomania), but also in that neither the mad and drug-addicted Elizabeth, who cannot fit into any world and accordingly dies, nor Fanny and Harriette, are judged. The desirability of motherhood is questioned. Yet despite the multiple possible worlds depicted, the ending is conventional, with a happy marriage, an heir, and all past troubles forgiven.

In contrast, in Dangerous, one of the latest Regencies, the hero and heroine share the same passion (investigating mysterious phenomena), and it is this which draws them together. There is little reference made to the hero's past exploits, except for the incident in which his family died. The hero has no desire to change the heroine; after meeting her once, he is "captivated" (23) by her. In other words, the reader has been told the battle is over before it has begun. It comes as no surprise that this text requires a whole host of villains, real and otherwise (Sebastian's family turn out to be nice in the end) to move the plot forward.

Since the sensibility found in romances regarding the ideal, yet possible heroine-hero relationship is decidedly contemporary, it is not surprising that there are certain faultlines in the romance plot. By avoiding the areas of possible pitfalls (prostitution, lack of education allowed for women, financial and material dependence) Quick creates a more smoothly-flowing narrative, without protracted

ideological arguments interspersed in the action. She also loses some of the "burn", the heightened emotional impact which makes romances "work". In glossing over the inequalities facing men and women during her chosen period, and in her chosen level of society, she lowers the risk factor. This is the effect of political correctness on romances.

Politically correct or not, the hero is still older than the heroine and wealthy. In all of Quick's romances the hero is approximately a decade older than the heroine (the same pattern holds true in Krentz's contemporary single titles). This of course allows the hero greater time to amass wealth. It would be pleasant to believe that wealth, like beauty, is only a romance label. However, while the female's beauty does not often extend beyond the hero's gaze, the hero's wealth is an important extension of the symbolism surrounding him. Indeed, it appears to matter less to the heroine than to those around her. True to form, the origin of the hero's wealth is often mysterious (Gabriel in Reckless) or inherited under dubious circumstances (Gideon in Ravished, Sebastian in Dangerous). It demonstrates his power and success by societal standards, and it can occasionally demonstrate his moral strength, as when Lucas demands of Victoria in Surrender that she put her money to good use. In fact, as the locals reflect on Julian: "He may have murdered his wife but he refrained from doing anything truly heinous such as throwing away his entire inheritance in a London gaming hell" (13).

And in Dangerous the local magistrate comments of the villain:

> "I regret to tell you that he will not be missed around these parts [...He] was in the habit of bringing up his fancy friends up from London at every opportunity. Unfortunately for the local shops, he brought his supplies along with him. Claimed he couldn't get good quality in the village. Never spent so much as a penny here" (331-332).

Lucas first begins to feel Victoria is accepting their marriage when she, the epitome of style, spends money in the local shops. Therefore the landowner heroes, who are really farmers, as Julian states (44), must look after their land in the same way they look after their family. This protectiveness is not seen as an attempt to deny anyone's

strength, as some feminists might claim; rather, as seen clearly in the attitude towards protecting estates, it is to help them prosper.

In terms of historical detail, it is a noticeable fact that the same historical details occur over and over in most texts. Quick uses the Regency period, although she does not use the traditional no-sex Regency paradigm. Most of the pertinent information contained in her novels is readily obtainable in romance reference works [3]. The information given to the reader concerning the heroine's occupation is minimal; in Ravished, Harriet finds an exciting tooth of a rare creature embedded in shale, perhaps a dinosaur, but the scientific information she exchanges with other fossilists is minimal (she is, however, a staunch believer in the theory of an Ice Age rather than a Flood). Likewise revellers go to Vauxhall, never to any of the lesser known gardens.

The self-inoculating effect is much in evidence in Quick's romances. The hero typically derides his fiancée/wife for her desire to be loved, telling her she had no doubt read too many romances. As one frustrated hero states: "For God's sake, woman, will you cease prattling on about metaphysics and romance? [...] This is a marriage, not a verse from an epic poem" (Scandal 142). Nevertheless, the heroine's innate optimism undermines the self-control of the hero, and he is of course proved quite wrong by the end of the novel. In other words, those despised romances tell the truth. Furthermore, the heroine's reading of Minerva Press novels and the such enforces the notion that the long tradition formed by romances has always been important to women.

In Rendezvous, Augusta sets up a women's club, called Pompeia's (after the wife Caesar divorced on suspicion of adultery, as the novel explains), modelled after gentlemen's clubs. Her husband, Harry, is a classicist who deplores Augusta's reckless ways as inappropriate for a well-bred-female. Augusta, contrary to his expectations, has read his works, but:

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[3] For example, in the "Historical Overview" by Annette Townend in Eileen Fallon, ed. 3-30.

> "The chief irritation I find in reading your historical research, sir, is that, in every single one of your volumes, you have contrived to ignore the role and contribution of females."
>
> "Females?" Harry gave her a blank look. He recovered at once. "Females do not make history."
>
> "I have decided one gains that impression chiefly because history is written by males, such as yourself," Augusta said (158-9).

It can be seen from the above quote that romances can be ananchronistically subversive when it suits them. Whether a romance is subversive or conservative regarding women's role, the patriarchy is never right. Contemporary heroines like Emily may wish for a traditional lifestyle (although, to be fair, it is much more likely that they will demand equal treatment with men), but in doing so they are aware that they are resisting society's expectations. Historical heroines such as Quick's are again resisting the expectations of their society. Perhaps because society is perceived as a male construct, it helps generate tension if the heroine is in constant conflict with the restrictions imposed upon her by society.

In peripheral romances, one may see many of the same generative plot devices found in texts more typical of the genre. In Meridon by Philippa Gregory, the hero does not appear until half-way through the text, which is far too late; in paradigmatic romances the hero (usually a stranger), must burst into the text at the earliest opportunity. However, the hero and heroine are driven apart by wilfulness on the heroine's part and her rejection of the honest love of the hero, who works the land, for money and "society". Her hard childhood, and especially the fate of her light-hearted sister, which convinces her to ignore softer feelings, is the focus of the first half of the text.

In Joan Aitken's The Young Lady From Paris, there are long "quiet" periods in the narrative, which are wholly given over to developing the historical background. This novel, although labelled romance [4], is strikingly different from Quick's narrative in that the heroine focalises it in bad faith, shying away from her deepest thoughts:

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[4] Joan Aitken is one of the romance novelists whose biography is included at the back of Eileen Fallon, ed. (168-170).

> When they had talked in the library, or about Dickens, she had felt for him a kind of comfortable, easy warmth, as she might for a dear friend, a dear brother. Not, however, as she felt towards Benedict! (139)

The reader is never certain of who the hero is until the very end, and Benedict is, in fact, her step-brother, illustrating the other possibility for the romance hero: instead of being a stranger, he has been known by the heroine forever. This raises the spectre of incest without confronting it, and it is perhaps fitting that this taboo faces off against that of the transgressive stranger. There is also a sub-plot dealing with lesbianism in this novel; one of the possible suitors at the end of the text is a woman. In both of the novels mentioned above, the gender roles typical of romance are reversed; it is the hero who sees clearly and must persuade the heroine to do so also.

In Colleen McCullough's The Ladies of Missalonghi, most of the text is occupied by the heroine's screwing up her courage to propose the pact to the hero. The life she wishes to escape, like the life of many of Quick's heroines, is very drab and circumspect, and she relieves its monotony with romance novels. Yet the description of her life is too detailed and too realistic to ever belong to a "real" romance heroine. Once she manages to strike her pact, the struggle begins, in high romance style, to convert the hero. In this she succeeds, and happiness, sexual ecstasy, a large and beautiful tract of land, and great wealth become hers.

"The cult of motherhood"

One aspect, already mentioned above, in which Seduction is not a typical romance is the resistance of the heroine to becoming a mother. Even though she told Julian she does not wish to become a mother without adjusting to her marriage first, and despite his avowed knowledge of contraceptives, he wishes an heir above all else. Sophy confronts him:

> "You will have gotten everything you wanted out of this marriage. An heir and no trouble. I trust you will be satisfied."
>
> "Sophy, I don't know what to say." Julian raked a hand through his hair. "If what you suspect is true, then I cannot deny I am well pleased. But

> I had hoped...that is, I had thought you would perhaps-" he broke off and fumbled awkwardly for the rest of his sentence. "I would have had you happier about the whole thing," he finally managed lamely.
>
> Sophy glared at him from under her brows, the last of her tears drying up in the face of his typical male arrogance. "You assumed, no doubt, that the prospect of impending motherhood would turn me into a sweet-tempered, contented wife? One who would be quite willing to give up all her personal aspirations in favor of devoting herself full time to running your country houses and rearing your children?"
>
> Julian had the grace to redden. "I had hoped it would make you more content, yes. Please believe me, I would have you happy in this marriage, Sophy."
>
> "Oh, do go away, Julian. I want a bath and a rest" (275-6).

This passage elucidates several assumptions about motherhood that are still current in our society. In the actual world, reproductive choice for women is societally circumscribed and often illusory. Any contraceptive, no matter how advanced, is only effective if it is both available and used. Sophy has no access to "a certain type of pouch made of sheep gut" (336), and anyway, the efficacy of such a technique would not depend on her. Studies have linked contraceptive failure to both self-esteem and the participants' attitude towards sex [5]; Sophy is well aware that she must prove fecund. "I could never forget that all you really wanted from me was an heir. It put a strain on me, Julian" (226).

Despite initial reluctance during her early pregnancy, Sophy adjusts to being a mother. Other heroines either anticipate becoming a mother or are happily delivered at the end of the story. In every case, the hero reacts erotically to the idea of a gravid partner and to the idea of a baby, and maternity. In Ravished, when the hero thinks the heroine may be pregnant:

> Gideon was aware of a deep surge of satisfaction and possessiveness at the prospect. He conjured up an image of Harriet rounded and soft with pregnancy and another of her holding his babe in her arms. They were both extremely pleasant pictures.

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[5] Meg Gerrard. "Emotional and Cognitive Barriers to Effective Contraception: Are Males and Females Really Different?" Females, Males and Sexuality: Theories and Research, ed. Kathryn Kelley (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1987) 213-242.

> He could just imagine Harriet sketching a fossil with one hand while she held an infant to her breast with the other (148).

Romance does exalt motherhood, and some feminist critics see this as showing a lack of respect for reproductive choice. However, given the confusing and sometimes hurtful choices a woman can make concerning reproduction in this society, the romance's simplistic, rather sentimental view of motherhood could possibly be construed by a reader not as a limiting of choices, but as a relief. Like successful partnering, parenthood is a matter of attitude, not genetics. No romance hero would spurn either a newly discovered child of his or an adopted child; the topic of adoption occurs frequently in contemporary romances.

The whole issue of motherhood and the possible problems it raises begs the issue of what conduits link the romance world to the actual one. Sexuality is one of these; it is posited as a driving force in one's personality by the psycho-analysts. When heterosexuality is expressed it may result in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases as well as erotic union. In the romance world, pregnancy, if it does not start off that way, ends happily and unambiguously in willing motherhood, and heroines never get STDs. Although the romance textual world shares common objects and common properties with the actual historical one and although natural and physical laws remain constant, with reference being made to human laws as well, it cannot be denied that the romance world of Regency England as presented in Amanda Quick's novels would seem strange indeed to many historians.

This is because, while it is faithful to received knowledge in some respects, the recreation of that era in the romance text is not from a historian's point of view, which is often concerned with the processes of change and the causes and results of such processes. Rather it is concerned with the surface of the world; the appearance it would have to a casual visitor from our own era. Appearance is an accurate word in this context, because it is unlikely that the smells of nineteenth century London, for example, would be discussed. For this reason, emphasis is on the quaint or weird customs and institutions, on notable types and places of entertainment. This focus makes the historical romance appear exotic and heightens its allure. The concept of

historical development in most historical romance is a truncated one; while characters may look forward to a day when, for example, women are allowed to wear breeches in public (e.g. Surrender 238), (an aspiration which accords well with the contemporary consciousness exhibited by many heroines), there is rarely any reflection on the past. This concept of time as only going forward from the starting point of the novel's setting accords with the interest only in the surface of the historical world.

A historical, as opposed to a contemporary setting, besides affording greater opportunity for glamour, also provides an insulation. There is an implicit belief in the romance, evidenced by the proselytising of the heroine, that history is a progression towards the present. Therefore, worse things can happen in a historical setting than can in a contemporary one. This heightens the risk factor, which as we have seen is very important to romance.

Many institutions which no longer exist or have changed can also be mentioned in a historical, where they would be less readily found in a series or contemporary romance. Again, the view of such institutions as gentlemen's clubs, prostitution, and marriage as a business alliance is informed by a modern, popular consciousness. There is also greater room for the heroine to be opinionated and caring in a historical text. A nineteenth century woman can complain about the treatment of women without being a feminist; she can rail against child labour conditions without being a socialist. After all, states the silent agreement between text and reader, things have improved since then.

The strict differentiation in gender lines for acceptable behaviour allows for greater comedic potential than in contemporary series. A heroine in breeches can seriously unbalance the self-control of a Regency hero; it is not noticed in a contemporary text. Also, the higher degree of social decorum that must be maintained affords for witty dialogue where the real meaning is hidden below the surface. It is in this last particular that the Regency setting shines; mediaevals, for example, are usually much less comedic in tone. This may be related to the fact that the most commonly-appearing plot in mediaevals is the uncouth warrior who distrusts

ladies being forced to marry the heroine to protect her lands from the rapacious villain. The plots in Regencies can be much less duty-bound, and more frivolous, as befits the glittering social world of their setting.

Those same strict gender lines, and the concept of social ruination, also create greater opportunities for emotionally intense situations. In Surrender, Victoria's behaviour places both her and Lucas, and her family, on the brink of social disaster, so she must submit to a unwanted marriage. The higher the barriers, the more energy must be invested in breaking them down. This, as well as the piquancy provided by the different habits and customs of past settings, makes historicals more complex, riskier, more peripatetic, and possibly more "romantic" than most contemporary writings. As Amanda Quick informs us "something about historical romance, in particular, defines the very word 'romance'" [6].

"The peace which surpasseth understanding"

It must be noted that a romance reader (one looking for the closure imposed upon the unequal beginning by the "happy ending") would most likely enjoy engaging in an active reading process with an uncompromising, phallic hero. After all, though he says the right words at the end, he does not have to lose face as he loses ground, since those three words assure him of the heroine's everlasting love. It is ironic that, despite the insistence of both readers and writers that the hero be a "man of action", big and strong, in the end it is what he says, not what he does, that carries most weight with the heroine. His actions at the beginning of the text, even though sometimes inexplicable to the heroine/reader, are not motivated by cruelty, but rather by his inability to deal with the new or unwelcome sensations the heroine rouses in him. Therefore his actions at the end of the novel, which are indicative of those new, partially accepted feelings, are also open to misinterpretation. This dual state of

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[6] As stated in the "About the Author" page which appears in the back of Amanda Quick books from Scandal (March 1991) onward.

inevitability and uncertainty generates sexual tension in the text and dramatic tension in the reader. It is therefore appropriate that the code of the romance as embodied in the texture, rather than the structure, of the texts is diegetic rather than mimetic. The narrator tells the reader what is happening, so that the reader can fully participate in the emotions roused in the characters by their ambiguous understanding of events.

Radway, in her list of plot functions, does not comprehend that while actions may be ambiguous, words are not. The hero must be inducted into the feminine sensibility of words (rather than actions, such as the senseless duelling), even though the pair-bonded relationship is occurring within the (outward) patriarchal rules of a man's world. The assumption of Radway and her feminist colleagues is that the reader identifies with the heroine; yet any romance reader knows that more and more often, the hero is the focalising character at least as often as the heroine. In Dangerous, there are more scenes of dilation, which are a type of narrative soliloquy, dealing with the hero than with the heroine. In fact, it may be that the hero, like Gideon in Ravished, finds the heroine's actions ambiguous, and is at a disadvantage even compared to the heroine, because he usually does not understand until almost the end of the novel why he reacts in such a way to this particular female, while self-knowledge comes early to the heroine. Therefore, if the reader is to gain enjoyment from having the anxieties provoked by the early part of the text where disagreements abound assuaged, and her belief in the solution presented by the text confirmed by the ending, she must identify with both the hero and heroine. As the reader partakes in the anxieties of the male, uncertain as to whether or not his final declaration of love will be accepted, her position vis-à-vis "patriarchy", or the happy ending, is considerably more complicated than the mere swallowing of anger and submission.

Because of their superior power, the males often act in a heavy-handed way that drives away their chosen ones. Having too much power can cause problems, just as having too little power can. The same is true of worldly freedom; if the male hero, with a wide experience of mistresses and such, wrongly attempts to place his wife in the same category, then he will have to face a reckoning as Julian does when "he was grimly aware that she was very unhappy and he was the cause" (278). The

woman, leading a much more circumscribed life, must immediately recognize that the hero represents her one great romantic adventure.

The heroine deals with the "wrong" done by the hero, who deliberately or inadvertently alters the fabric of her life, by engulfing and containing it (literally so in the old ravishment romances). She neutralises the inequalities by appropriating them, by labelling and challenging them. In doing so, she changes the hero's way of thinking. This in turn relates back to the identificatory manner of reading that was proposed as the common mode for romance reading in the second chapter. If one identifies with the heroine, appropriates her anger and her wishes, the ending will be satisfactory, as it represents not a revenge, but a catharsis, for all the earlier uncertainties and struggles.

As Mieke Bal noted, the difference between high and popular culture is the Ding an sich and reception as an event (11). She asks if there is a link between narrative and ideological finesse (171). Certainly the ideology of romance is not presented as a smooth, seamless artefact; it thrives on contradictions. However, the exploration of the possible combination of those contradictions allows for a greater multiplicity of interpretations than might originally be assumed. That there is a lack of narrative finesse, as measured by conventional literary standards, is indisputable. However, it may be assumed that the evolution of the romance genre, motivated as it is not by critical praise, but by audience reception, developed in the manner it did for a specific purpose. The romance code is the focus of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THE WET TEXT:

## the codes of romance

> Why am I happy writing this textbook? What sublime idiocy!
> What a waste of time! A textbook on prosody at that.
> Yet when I sit down to comb the business out, when I
> address the easel of this task, I burn with an even
> flame, I'm cooking with gas. There are some things
> so dull they hypnotize like the pendulum of a clock,
> so clockwork and quotidian they make the flesh
> delirious like fresh water.
>
> Karl Shapiro

> "You are always playacting, Lambert."
> "Ah, but you cannot equate that with not being serious."
>
> Julie Tetel, And Heaven Too

Romance tells, it does not show. The heavy reliance placed in paradigmatic romances on a core group of heavily evocative or connotative words is no accident; each word refers to other usages of the word, just as each plot forms part of the romance web which enfolds the initiated reader. Critics such as Jensen and Snitow may refer to the "flat" Harlequin style (Snitow 143), but to the initiated reader, those stock phrases are part of the romance experience. Romance style, unlike the canonised style of "high literature", does not rely on the polyvalency of each word, but rather on their particular (some might say peculiar) resonances within the romance canon. Phrases such as "the hungry assault of his mouth" (Out of the Night 43), or "He longed to ravish her even as he longed to keep her safe" (Rendezvous 57) do not refer either to actual acts of ravishment (that is, forced, non-consensual sexual

activity) or to proving that a man has physical strength and superiority over a female. They may read that way to a feminist critic who already views the romance reader as a poor, oppressed Other, and who is determined to deny any pleasure she may find in the text as too unsophisticated or unegalitarian for her, but they are not read that way by a romance reader.

"Tell me a story about how you adore me"

Barlow and Krentz claim that description in the romance is always comprised of two levels: the archetypal fantasy underlying the tale (often the rape of Persephone) and the actuality portrayed in the textual world (27). The ravishment on the allegorical level is the "dark" hero's attempt to abduct the "light" heroine; an attempt which will end in compromise, due to the ingenuity of the heroine. On the level of the textual actual world, ravishing is a word like scrumptious or exotic, that is highly charged, conveying to the romance reader a sense of excitement. Oxymoronic descriptions, such as "violent tenderness", which abound in romance, work even more clearly on two levels. Their theory is interesting to a literary critic, but it must be questioned whether a reader so closely analyses her response to the text. However, it does help to explain why readers react favourably to descriptions containing words which are so inflammatory to those politically correct.

The novelist Lois Gould, whose novel A Sea-Change was praised by Ms magazine and the New York Times Book Review, among others, deals with women's issues. (Helen Hazen cites Gould's works as examples of feminist books which are degrading to both sexes (42-43), yet praises the writings of Lolah Burford (6-12). One turn further around on the critical merry-go-round, Radway feels that Burford's Alyx is a terrible piece of writing (70), and her reading group hated it, labelling it a "trashcan romance"). In A Sea-Change, a hurricane becomes the metaphor for woman's power unleashed; woman's power is linked to inchoate, but powerful fluid forms, with stillness at the very core. This reflects back to Julie Tetel's romance

heroine, quoted in Chapter Three. Like many romances, Gould's narrative deals with the changing norms for male behaviour:

> As with his treatment of adult women, his handling of daughters had once been the norm for daddies; now it was frowned on. Foolish, certainly, if not offensive. Probably unhealthy. Yet he was helpless to change it. Or rather, he refused to see that he ought to (53).

This quote reflects the challenges Quick's heroes have vis-à-vis their wives. Yet the romance hero does manage to change, and in a manner that satisfies the heroine.

In Gould's novel, the female protagonist metamorphoses herself into the man who terrifies and enthralls her. The children of her marriage appear to "naturally" belong to the female element, by virtue of living in their own carefully ordered worlds, not obeying the dictates of male society. They unquestioningly accept the change in her. A female friend finds herself irresistibly drawn to the wo-man. Gould does not suggest stereotypical domesticity, but the metamorphosed protagonist, newly named B.G. Kilroy (her husband was called Roy) and the children live together as a family unit. This view of metamorphosing is a different solution to the question posed by romance novels - how to tame the Beast, Nemesis, the Dark Angel. It can be argued that both romances and more innovative fiction such as Gould's arise from the same basic questions of women's existence, defined as they often are by physical beauty, spousal occupation and motherhood. Yet the more prosaic solutions of romance (find the perfect man) are easier to obtain than Gould's of becoming the (desired, not perfect) man. Romances assume desire is perfect, that any contradictions in it can be justified. Often, after the hero has made the initial, sometimes shocking, overtures, the heroine realises that she does in fact desire him to ravish her. Desire in the romance brings closure to a whole set of problematic emotions, including complicity and anger. In doing so, they make sexual desire itself another system with closure, something which one suspects is unlikely to happen in the actual world.

Radway does not discuss in detail the texture of the historical romances she reviews, focussing her attention on plot. Yet the romance text has certain triggers

which correspond to functions. These triggers consist of a set of typical details, described in a typical style of language, that the romance reader can probably decode without being aware of what she is doing. They allow the reader to assess where she is in terms of the progression of the plot, and are as important as the textual narrative dilations, serving the same dual functions. These triggers, expounding on important moments and essential romance traits, both ensure the expected ending to the text and delay it. For example, it is easy to spot the hero in a paradigmatic romance novel. The texture of the novel, the narrative gaze, if one wishes to follow Eco's usage, which sweeps with nonchalant ease over castles, carriages, ballrooms and the like, lingers on the hero. Certain words and phrases pick him out. His eyes are always noted, the most commonly used descriptors being "lazy-eyed" (Beverley, My Lady Notorious 1), "hard-eyed" or "cool" (Surrender 4). "He managed to imbue the delicate act of pouring tea with a riveting masculinity and grace," one of Krentz's heroines notes of the hero in her contemporary Wildest Hearts (5). "Sebastian moved with a lazy, dangerous masculine grace," in her historical Dangerous (5).

In addition to the full physical description, there is information given which instructs the reader how to interpret the appearance of the hero. There is a heavy emphasis on the use of descriptive words, both nouns and verbs with strong connotative qualities and on adjectives and adverbs. It is interesting to compare the current romance style with the esteemed precursor of Heyer. In Arabella (originally published 1949):

> [Bertram] brought his hack up to the phaeton, and bowed politely, only slightly quizzing her with his eyes. Mr Beaumaris, glancing indifferently at him, caught this arch look, became aware of a slight tension in the trim figure beside him, and looked under his lazy eyelids from one to the other (153).

Compare this with a scene showing the hero responding to stimuli from Dangerous:

> He slid her a suspiciously bland look of inquiry. "Why, then, did you select it?"
>
> "So that I would no longer invite comment," Prudence muttered, exasperated.

> Sebastian did not move, but there was a sudden aura of alertness about him that made Prudence wary [...] "Bloody hell." Sebastian uncoiled with the lethal grace of a predator pouncing on its prey (215-216).

Heyer uses longer sentences; she is particularly fond of subordinate clauses, while a contemporary writer is usually advised to keep sentences short in order to heighten their dramatic impact, and facilitate reading. The heavily adjectival style is already in evidence, but the words themselves are not as colourful as a contemporary writer would most likely use (Arabella evinces a "slight tension"; Sebastian is a lethal predator), and the actions described would also be more extreme; Mr Beaumaris is more than ordinarily perspicacious, while many romance heroes especially those who are kept from their love by a misunderstanding, seem on the wrong side of ordinary obtuseness.

Heyer's language bears a greater resemblance to actual Regency texts than current romances do; her heroes always have a cutting remark handy. Upon observing a detestable man, likely to importune the heroine, "'A common bow in passing will be enough to damp his pretensions,'" said Mr Beaumaris. 'If that does not suffice, I will look at him through my glass'" (220). The notion of effectively vanquishing a rival with the aid of a quizzing glass is an example of the ludicrously disproportionate stylings that Camille Paglia labels "epicene comedy". As she notes, an epicene hero "<u>has</u> acted or <u>will</u> act, but he must never be <u>seen</u> to be acting" (531). With his languid mannerisms, and complicated neckties, Mr Beaumaris lacks the aggressive masculinity of today's heroes. He is an "androgyne of manners" (ibid.). Today's romances attempt to always heighten the emotional impact of the text on the reader by means of heightened conflict, both internal and external to the pair-bond. Heyer's comedic stylings, it will be noted, have a cool, intellectual quality about them that has to my knowledge completely vanished today. One can see this change most dramatically in the ubiquitous sex scene.

There is a core group of highly emotional words that is used repeatedly during romance sex scenes. The aim of such language is to intensify both the sense of masculinity and of femininity. Yet at some point those systems intersect, showing

how the romance code acts as a macrocosm of the text as a whole, since the same "feminisation" or "domestication" of the male is seen in the plot. In the first extended sex scene from Dangerous (187-94), if one abstracts all the emotionally-loaded verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and places them side by side, the different gender-related patterns of phallic or forceful descriptors alternating with female or less forceful descriptors can be observed.

The male vacillates between softness and hardness or gentleness and deliberateness throughout the scene, ending on a gentle note. To begin with, he moves "softly", "slowly". Then "deliberately", with "anticipation", he "pressed". As he draws the heroine ever closer, words include "gently", "eased", "tenderness", "whispered". Such descriptors are less focussed than, for example, "ripped", "impatient"or "yanked", which are all used as the hero is disrobing (his shirt does not survive intact.) However, during actual intimate sexual interaction, the hero becomes gentle once again. Typical of the phrases describing him are "gently forced", "eased", "slowly", "gradually", "soft", "persuasive" and "started". He ends by watching the woman and withdraws "reluctantly".

The heroine's reactions traverse a more straightforward path. As the scene begins, descriptors assigned to her include "still", "immobility", "wide, searching gaze" and "curiosity". Then as she begins to make movements, words such as "small", "little", "gentle", "soft" and "delicate" are often repeated. However, during active sexual engagements, her words become more deliberate. They include "grasped", "clenched", "arched", "lock", "clutched", "clamped", "trapping", "intense" and "rigid".

The heroine's reactions take up more textual space, although the focalising of the narrative alternates between hero and heroine. Many of the words describing one character are thought by the opposite character; we do not see them as they see themselves, but as the other sees them. Fortunately for reader and characters, what the other sees is very alluring. As well as the two focalising voices, there is a dual approach in the sex scenes. The heroine speaks first:

> "If my effect on you is anything like yours on me, we are faced with a most unusual problem, sir. I am not at all certain what we should do next."
>
> "As it happens, I know precisely what to do next" (89).

Therefore the paradigmatic romance sex scene becomes a song both of innocence and experience.

This can be seen in extreme form in texts where the heroine imagines that her unusual response to the hero is nausea, caused by an allergic reaction. In Gentle Rogue by Johanna Lindsey, the heroine, who is in time-honoured romance tradition posing as a boy (might this be emblematic of the romance heroine's desire to fuse genders, at least within her pair-bond?) begins to explain:

> "[...] I only get sick when you're around, mostly when I get too near you. [...] It's just this real funny queasiness I feel, and shortness of breath, and I get so warm, well...actually hot, but I'm almost positive it's not fever. And this weakness comes over me, like my strength is just draining away."
>
> James just stared, unable to believe what he was hearing? Didn't the wench know what she was describing? She couldn't be that innocent (113-114).

Again, the focalising trades off between the two protagonists, offering two different "takes" on the same scene.

Of course, a third understanding is present: the reader's. Take for example two separate "first kiss" scenes. In Reckless, the scene is presented from the male's point of view:

> Instead of clasping her hand in a ritual handshake, however, he used his grip to pull her close. Before she realized his intent, he lifted the veil of her hat, exposing her startled features to the pale glow of the moon.
>
> The lady gasped then froze in stunned shock.
>
> Gabriel raked the upturned face of his sweet tormentor with the fierce curiosity that had been burning within him for weeks. The need to know her identity had become as powerful a force as physical desire [...]
>
> Even as anger began to replace the astonished shock on her face, Gabriel bent his head and took her mouth (36-38).

This scene indicates the beginning of the sexual interaction that runs throughout the text, interspersed with comedic and action scenes, as well as the reflective dilations.

The leitmotifs of each character are established: exotic allure squaring off against piratic plunder. The heroine is "startled", "stunned", and "astonished". It would be difficult for any reader to miss the point. Yet the reader can see beyond the words of the text and predict with accuracy the future significance of the scene. The shock and anger of the heroine will become acceptance and outright yearning, while the desire that propels the hero forward will never be assuaged. In Ravished, the scene shifts to the heroine's focalisation:

> "Rubbish." Harriet's fingers were trembling on the lamp, but she held her ground. "I believe you are deliberately trying to frighten me, sir."
>
> "Damn right." His hand closed around the nape of her neck. The leather of his glove was rough against her skin.
>
> Harriet abruptly read the intent in him, but it was too late to run. Gideon's fierce, leonine eyes flamed behind his hooded dark lashes. He brought his mouth heavily down on hers in a crushing kiss (55).

The next paragraph states unequivocably what the reader already knows; that this experience is without parallel for the heroine. Romances must gratify their readers, and to this end, while their language is often inflammatory, they never keep reader expectations dangling unfulfilled for too long. In the scene above, there is the requisite overcoding of Gideon's actions: "fierce", "heavily", "crushing". The heroine's response is ordained by his coding: "After the initial shock, a shimmering, glittering excitement roared through her" (56).

In the quoted scenes, both heroes are frustrated by the seeming indifference of the heroine to anything but the adventure at hand. Each is trying to demonstrate that just as the heroine has the ability to undermine his concentration and self-confidence (remember Matt Slater in Out of the Night), he can rattle her, too. He is not behaving in the manner in which the heroine initially expected him to, because he is deliberately transgressing barriers of sexual and social decorum. The heroine's positive reaction to this transgression triggers the hero's desire to provoke more of the same--they are both, in a sense, taking risks (although the heroine must obey more dictates of decorum and therefore is in a more dangerous position). Incidentally, the romance code may help explain why most paradigmatic romances are written in the third

person omniscient point of view: it is difficult to imagine a first-person voice uttering phrases such as "she felt his engorged shaft forge deeply into her tight, convulsing body" (Reckless 238).

Although the (male ordained) barriers delineating women's acceptable action may be more rigid than those controlling men, the essence of femininity refuses to be contained. Female vaginal fluids are "sweet, hot honey" (Surrender 158), or just plain "honey" (Reckless 128). Yet there is also "the honey of domestic harmony" (Surrender 206), which can only be provided by a willing, co-operative wife. "Lucas realized he thirsted mightily for each small sip" (ibid.) of domestic honey, and he tells his wife:"'I would sell my soul to get you to seduce me'" (206). The spheres linked with women flow, enveloping the men. The vagina is described as a "feminine passage" (Dangerous 155) or "tight passage" (Rendezvous 168) or even a "soft, damp sheath" (Ravished 233). It is no accident that it is through the realisation (which includes sexual union) of their love, that the men are reborn into a female consciousness.

During sexual interaction, the size and strength of the male protects the female; as well, it provides a contrast to her. If the mating ritual is as archetypal as the text implies, the differences between male and female are part of a yin and yang needed for cosmic harmony. (This may help explain the prevalence in romance texts of what Germaine Greer calls the cosmic orgasm (217)). Females are soft and liquid, males are hard and controlled. During the initial sexual encounter, the male controls himself, as though his superior strength and experience would annihilate the female if he did not use restraint [1].

> Augusta could feel the rigid tension in him as he held himself in check (Rendezvous 122).
>
> He suddenly felt a fierce need to protect her even as he introduced her to her own passion (Reckless 128).

---

[1] It has been pointed out to me that in this respect, romance heroes resemble Klingons from Star Trek: The Next Generation, who are surely examples of the warrior mystique.

However, by the end of the text, when the male has admitted, at least to himself, his need for the female, he also turns to fluid.

> Then he poured himself into her in a long, long release that seemed to have no beginning and no end (Ravished 371).

> When she gently convulsed in her release Sebastian shuddered heavily and surrendered to the raging torrent that roared through him (Dangerous 273).

Convulsion is a muscular response, and so associates itself with the male domain of physicality, but the heroine does it gently. The hero surrenders, a typically female response (at least in romance terms), but his release is not gentle but rather "raging". Therefore it can be seen that although to some extent the hero has become fluid like the heroine, there still must remain enough difference between the two of them to give the text the required heterosexual piquancy.

It sounds very much as if the women wish to make their husbands their children. Unlike the assumptions underlying the works of theorists such as Michèle Roberts, they do not wish for daughters so that they can reproduce the closeness and nurturing they miss; instead they wish to recreate men, to remake their consciousness, as well as their physical experience. All the children mentioned are males, heirs, and yet they are shown as being the responsibility of their mothers. This is how children are in fact reared, but it implies that perhaps the sons will not make the same mistakes the fathers did. This conviction is strengthened when it is remembered that often the hero's initial resistance to love comes from observing his parents' marriage, or from his own previous marriage.

Femaleness and female sexuality, which is seen as the incontrovertible proof of femininity, are portrayed in liquid terms, so it comes as no surprise that maleness and male sexuality is seen as a solid, defined entity. The heroes are physically bigger and stronger than the heroines. While biology tends to corroborate this literary pattern, there is a definite emphasis on size differentials in the romance text. One obvious implication of this is to make the hero literally, as well as psychically, the most important figure in the textual landscape.

> She had never encountered a man like him.
>
> He was incredibly large. Like his horse, he was tall and solidly built, with broad, sleekly muscled shoulders and thighs. His hands were massive and so were his feet. [...]
>
> Everything about St. Justin, who appeared to be in his mid-thirties, was hard and strong and potentially fierce.
>
> His face reminded Harriet of the magnificent lion she had seen (Ravished 23-24).

Male ideals of honour and codes of conduct are well-defined; as underlined in Seduction, they are applied only to males and then only to males of a certain class. Likewise males lay down dictates and then expect them to be followed; every Quick hero does this, from Simon attempting to wreak vengeance on his bride's family, to Sebastian trying to deny Prudence the right to be involved in dangerous investigations. Every heroine defies these rules and her successful challenge to the neatly-ordered hierarchy is one of the things that makes the hero love her. It would appear that barriers are there to be crossed.

"Jesus' blood never failed me yet" [2]

The romance code makes it clear that the dichotomies in the plot and in the texture are not only conscious, they are considered necessary. In typical romance diegetic style, a Mary Jo Putney heroine muses:

> Strange to think that it was the harsher elements between them that gave her feelings for him such depth and intensity. With Robin there was always harmony, and their love was that of friends, almost siblings. Rafe she wanted as a mate, the archetypal male who made her feel most deeply female (Petals in the Storm 225).

It is not only the hero who is such an archetypal paragon. The hero in the same novel thinks, "For him, Margot was the essence of female mystery" (215). This type

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[2] A reference to the performance piece by Gavin Bryars, which features a whole recording's worth of repetition of the hymn's refrain, including the last two lines: "There's one thing I know/For He loves me so". Gavin Bryars with Tom Waits. Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet. Point Music, 438-823-2, 1993.

of archetypal gender pairing may relate back to the Jungian anima/animus relationship. There may be mythological, rather than psycho-analytical overtones present, however. In Kingsley's No Sweeter Heaven, a book awash in God:

> He took her with primitive urgency and she accepted him as if she were the earth and he her reaper [...] she nurtured his need in the deepest well of her body. He sank into her, surrendering to her the last of his strength as she took his seed with warmth and welcome and joy.
>
> Lily's lips turned up in a satisfied smile, a high flush on her cheeks. "I feel like Demeter," she murmured. "Mother-goddess of earth" (316).

Allusions are always explained so that no reader is left ignorant of the implications of the passage. In this matter, romance is far more egalitarian than much canonised literature.

This is not to deny that there can exist intertextual "literary" references in romances. In Rendezvous, Harry and Augusta consummate their relationship in a carriage moving randomly around the streets of London. In Tetel's And Heaven Too there is a romantic dalliance in a theatre, which mimics Emma and Rodolphe at the country fair, where two scenes are depicted concurrently, each commenting on the other. The text revels in romantic double entendre: "The first act was nearing its climax" (140). Madame Bovary parodies romance conventions. But since Rendezvous and And Heaven Too, as romances, end happily, the scene in the mass-market texts are parodying the parody of the genre. Flaubert (and perhaps by extension all canonised literature) is wrong. A happy ending is possible.

There are also overt references to fairy tales and other forms of popular culture: in Ravished, the hero Justin is called the "Beast of Blackthorne Hall" (19) and he calls the heroine Harriet "the most beautiful woman I have ever known" (226). As a fossilist, Harriet discovers "the Great Beast of Upper Biddleton" (384). In the last two pages of the text, there are numerous references made to her "beast":

> "It is in print at last, Gideon. From now on everyone will know that the cave beast belongs to me."
>
> He smiled. "Congratulations, my dear. Somehow I think that everyone already knew that" (ibid.)

> "I know my beast is something very rare and precious indeed." [...]
> "Your beast would be nothing without you, my love," Gideon said softly. "He would still be locked in stone" (385).

The very last words of the novel, when Harriet looks at her baby son, are "You will tame him, my love. You have a way with beasts" (ibid.). The double entendres feel "literary" even though the very simplicity of their code makes them accessible to all; obviously this novel relies for part of its impact upon readers' remembrances of the tale of Beauty and the Beast.

When allusions are explained, reader expectations are often not only gratified, but enlarged upon, by the narrative. "The footman had a face as forbidding as Cerberus, the three-headed dog that was said to guard the gates of Hell," Prudence muses in Dangerous (3). Immediately following this, readers learn that the man she is to meet bears the nickname of the Fallen Angel, which indicates both what kind of hero he is, and what his probable attitude towards life will be. His cat is called Lucifer. True to form, all of the ton warns Prudence against the supposedly ennui-ridden conscience-less Sebastian; only the heroine can perceive and unlock his inner goodness.

Seeing clearly is a trait associated with the heroine in the typical romance. It is therefore interesting, and perhaps an example of the way romance courts its readers, that the text makes sure the reader can share in moments of epiphany:

> Gideon awakened shortly after dawn to a world that seemed far more clear and serene than it had in a long while. He lay quietly for a moment, savoring the revelation that had settled itself into his heart during the night.
> He loved Harriet. He would love her for the rest of his life (Ravished 371-72).

At the risk of becoming repetitive, this scene is "over-coded", having many words with similar evocations. So they are not a let-down to the reader, even the "quiet moments", the revelations of the text, are presented in as dramatic a fashion as are all the skirmishes and entanglements leading up to them.

It is a rare reference that is not explained in the text. In Rendezvous, Augusta consistently charges Harry with being stuffy and overly concerned with proprieties, a

result, no doubt of his classical training. Harry prides himself on his knowledge and self-control. However:

> He opened Observations on Livy's History of Rome and tried to read the first few pages to see how his work looked in print. But he did not get far. All he could think about was how he would go about making love to his new wife in a proper bed.
>
> After a moment Harry decided he really was not in the mood to read a discourse on Roman history, even if he himself had written it. He closed his own book and went to a bookshelf to take down a copy of Ovid (146).

The passage presages the intersection of the protagonists' apparently opposing sets of defining characteristics. Even stuffy classicists can be erotic, but conversely, the best-written and most erudite of treatises, no matter how estimable the author, do not provide satisfying reading material all the time.

"Surely Shakespeare is wicked" [3]

The romance code is self-aggrandising. Not only is it over-coded in that synonyms often tumble over each other in any given scene, but the words chosen are always dramatic. In fact, sometimes the language is more dramatic than the actions. This can be seen particularly in non-hybrid series romances such as the Harlequin Presents Out of the Night, where Matt and Emily's re-meeting is a sure sign of Fate intervening. The physical interaction is overwhelming for both of the protagonists in a romance ("He had never wanted a woman the way he wanted Phoebe" Reckless 127; "She was caught up in a golden, glittering illusion" ibid. 195), and so, presumably, to the reader also. A romance text depends on the reader identifying with the protagonist(s). Identificatory reading coupled with diegetic texts allow for the efficacy of both the active and reflective scenes where textual dilation occur, every small detail being exploited by the writer and reader.

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[3] Surely a wicked misquote: A line from Stephen Spender's poem "An Elementary School Class Room in a Slum", which emphasises the importance of contextualising in all teaching.

> Harry felt, heard and inhaled it all; every nuance of her response communicated itself to him. As he watched Augusta surrender to her first climax, he realized he had never seen anything so magnificently feminine, so passionate and sensual in his entire life (Rendezvous 169).

The passage demonstrates several traits of the romance code. All senses are appealed to; the language is colourful and repetitive. It is a unique experience for both protagonists, and represents an undoubted pinnacle of magnificent passion. (The moment of orgasm is prolonged in the text because it is part of the "gift" of virginity which is such an important motif.) Yet, at some level, the language is empty. Why is this so feminine and archetypal and overwhelming? The text does not demonstrate the why, only the what; the reader must read in good faith.

This technique, of drawing the reader's attention through the text by means of a well-established series of conventions ("Only one man had this effect on Augusta's senses" Rendezvous 3), and interspersing action scenes with dilations at appropriate intervals, is different from the technique Eco records in James Bond novels. Both the ordinary and the extraordinary are glossed over in the romance; all attention is focussed on the interaction of the protagonists. An exception to this may be found in paranormal romances, where the reader must accept what is (even within the romance system) unusual.

There are several possible methods of incorporating the fabulous into the romance text. In time-travel romances, which are so popular they have almost attained the status of a sub-genre in their own right, the heroine usually tries to formulate a semi-rational hypothesis for what occurred. In other romances, God is cited directly as causing the unforeseen to occur. This is the case in Kirstin Hannah's Once in Every Lifetime, where God gives a woman whose first life is unsatisfactory another chance. A hypothesis, which, if not rational, is certainly comforting, and loosely based on the popular conception of a Christian afterlife anyway. In Kingsley's No Sweeter Heaven the heroine accepts the hero's supernatural healing abilities because she does not know that they are not normal; she sees auras also. The hero, on the other hand, is bitterly aware of his difference, and is afraid the

heroine will reject him once she realises the full extent of his powers. Here one sees again the dual approach (awareness and ignorance) that was used in the sex scenes. The characters' points of view in effect neutralise each other, making it possible for the reader to accept the healing in the context of the book, especially as the first few healing scenes are shown from the heroine's matter of fact perspective.

In romances, psychological "realism" is not necessary to induct the reader into the text, since romances have their own encoded and archetypal realism. This includes the mythological references, the allusions to fate, even the overwhelming use of adjectives all reinforcing the reader's interpretation; in short, all that makes the romance code self-aggrandising. There are stylemes appropriate for almost every function in the romance plot. In each book of Catherine Coulter's Bride Trilogy, when the hero is forced to re-evaluate his initial impression of the heroine, he says, "Well, hell" (i.e., Hellion Bride 90, 179, 292, 308). This shows how one author may narrow her code down even more than is the romance norm; is it really plausible that three separate men would all have exactly the same speech habit? Of course it is not, but this tag, once identified, makes it easier for the reader to contextualise the hero's reaction when next she encounters it. When all the books in the trilogy are read, as they are meant to be, the effect feeds upon itself, the sum of the whole being greater than the parts. The way the story is told takes precedence over what is being told. Romance code is by no means the only type of discourse to so disguise its content: literary criticism does exactly the same thing, and it is often just as referential to texts of the same genre as romances are.

Does the heavy repetition of certain phrases and pacing lead to plagiarism? Some of the examples cited from Quick novels are so similar it is confusing to try and keep the texts fully separate. However, I have only noted two examples in the paradigmatic mass-market romances cited in the Bibliography of authors plagiarising, and in neither case was the plagiarism from another paradigmatic romance author. Penelope Williamson, in Keeper of the Dream, includes a scene which is a variation upon one in the romantic Bildungsroman by Cecelia Holland, Great Maria. A much more blatant case of plagiarism occurs in Mary Jo Putney's Silk and Shadows, where

she copies almost word for word a passage describing Victorian flagellation brothels from Reay Tannahill's Sex in History. This reflects badly not only on the author (she claims to have two university degrees, one in literature), but also on the editors of romance texts. The Tannahill book is scarcely an obscure source; I purchased my copy through a mail-order book club. Interestingly enough, Topaz and Onyx, Putney's publishers, are a division of Penguin, Tannahill's fiction publisher. It is unfortunate further in that both Putney and Williamson are authors who contributed to the Krentz anthology, a book which attempts to vindicate the romance writing profession. Comparative citations from both source and plagiarised texts can be found in the Appendix.

There is, however, another type of plagiarism routinely practised in the romance publishing world, one that touches on an important aspect of the texts not so far discussed in this study. Romance cover art is often a source of derision from non-readers, especially until very recently, when step-back covers came into prominence. Indeed, it is safe to generalise that a step-back cover signifies a more popular author than the old-fashioned cover where heaving bosoms are in plain view. Step-backs are stiffened glossy flaps which usually feature the title of the novel and the author's name prominently, and then a small abstract or decorative motif. The "clinch" page forms the frontispiece of the book. These books look more respectable if one is seen reading in public than the regular covers. However, step-back or not, an author under contract is encouraged to cut out pictures of possible prototypes of her protagonists from glossy magazines, and to send them to her publisher's art department, where the photographs are used as the basis for the cover illustration. This is an infringement on the original photographer's copyright. One author I know selected a Victoria's Secret catalogue picture as the model for an Intrigue cover; the cover looks remarkably like the photo. Even in historical cover paintings, the protagonists must appear as Beautiful People of today; they are likewise described

according to just such an anachronistic aesthetic in the text [4]. The historical element in these works is never more than a glamour in the magical sense of the word, a screening off of these events from real life, making them both more exciting, more seductive, and safer.

"You (never) leave me dry"

Just as the character's appearance is anachronistic, so is their language. Modern idiomatic expressions are mixed in with period tags. In Surrender:

> "Take it easy, darling, this is not supposed to be an act of martyrdom," Lucas whispered.
> "I'm sorry. Please, Lucas, go ahead. I will be all right" (158).

Such language is odd from a couple who, a few pages previously, were partly attired in a "gown and petticoats" and "highly polished Hessian" (153) boots. Or, in Rendezvous,

> "I was searching for a taper when you snuck up behind me [...] I suspect you are rather annoyed with me, my lord" (108).

"My lord" and "madam" are frequently inserted into the characters' dialogue, as a reminder of the setting (the ton of Regency England). Hessian boots, jackets by Weston, and well-sprung phaetons appear in the text, with similar intent. Such dialogue also reinforces the characters' social positions. Somebody who utters the sentence: "Yer too good at this sort o' thing, that's yer problem" (Dangerous 33) is not likely to be a member of the highest reaches of society. The fact that neither the dialogue of the main characters nor that of the secondary figures can be construed as accurate for the time or psychologically realistic does not matter. Reading the romance text is a game, and the text embodies another game, that of the readjustment of two separate personalities into one pair-bond that must, in turn, function in society.

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[4] For a discussion of this, and also of the generic but connotative words, such as "cloak" and "breeches", used to describe clothes in popular historical fiction, see Anne Hollander, Seeing Through Clothes. New York: Viking, 1978. 427-432.

> It was becoming clear that the task of stalking this particular heiress would be the most exacting hunting he had ever done. One wrong move, one miscalculation on his part, and he would lose the game (Surrender 39).

The text is not about doing one's duty ("task"), and it is not about a safari ("hunting", "stalking"). Nor is it about mathematics ("miscalculation"). The hero's favourite word is "strategy" (i.e., 216, 300), and the text is, of course, in large part about a game. The skirmishes between heroine and hero, labelled by Bettinotti et al. as "confrontations polémique" (85) and analysed from a serious feminist ideological perspective, are an essential part of this game. Although ideology can be discussed, the romance reader is most likely not looking for a considered philosophical text.

One of the other methods used to enhance the ludic qualities of the text is the use of humour. Humour is used especially regarding those topics which are also the focus of the emotionally intense "burn" scenes. This gives two approaches to the subject, an emotional one and a humorous one, similar to the dual approach to the sex scenes. Regarding marriage:

> "I know you would prefer that I not romanticize the matter, my lord. I am endeavouring to take a more realistic view of our marriage."
>
> "Make the best of things, in other words?"
>
> She brightened. "Precisely, my lord. Rather like a pair of draft horses that are obliged to work in harness together. We must share the same barn, drink from the same trough, eat from the same hay bale."
>
> "Sophy," Julian interrupted, "please do not draw any more farming analogies. I find they cloud my thinking" (Seduction 94-94).

In Rendezvous, the sophisticated Augusta prefers to compare choosing a husband to choosing a racing horse:

> "Look for good blood, strong teeth, and sound limbs. Avoid the creature that shows any inclination to kick or bite. Pass up one which exhibits a tendency towards laziness. Avoid the beast which displays excessive stubbornness. Some thickheadedness is unavoidable and no doubt to be expected, but too much probably indicates genuine stupidity. In short, search out a willing specimen who is amenable to training" (252).

Such humour is rather broad and self-explanatory. It does not rely for effect on discrete implication, and it is not an example of epicene comedy.

Juliet Mitchell is not interested in dilation as much as she is in disruption, in the taking of one history and re-creating it as another (426). She points out that the novel is not only a form largely shaped by women, but that in the process of creating a novelistic corpus, women also defined themselves. Remember that heroines of historical romances read romances; the romance text presents the romance reading process as a repeating action. Mitchell believes that the novel must be a hysterical discourse because "Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism" (427). Leaving aside Mitchell's interest in the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal as states which define each other, one could similarly consider the two states in the romance text--masculinity and femininity. The romance text differs from what Mitchell theorises about psychological formation (427-8) in that it is the feminine and the not-feminine which defines the romance world, instead of the masculine and the not-masculine. Within the text, a game is played in which the not-feminine must be transformed into the almost-feminine. Mitchell feels that language is phallocentric, and that novels, composed of language must therefore exist with the paternal, or symbolic order. She feels that "the imaginary, the semiotic, the carnival [...] is set up by the law precisely as its own ludic space" (428). Even if the game of the romance text is not controlled by men, the arena in which the game takes place (the novel) is. Yet she also understands that a romantic figure (in the love and yearning sense of the word) aims towards oneness. In the romance text, this oneness is attained. However, Mitchell feels that "'Oneness' is the symbolic notion of what happens before the symbolic" (429); it is no escape at all. No escape as long as the rules of phallocentric language are followed. Unfortunately, while romance writing ignores many of the dictates of "good taste" (see Eco, Open Work, 180-216), the language it proposes instead is too limited in scope, denied any referential existence outside the text by its very hallmark, its flamboyancy and overcoding. Despite this, inside the text, many romance novels do fully exploit the novel as a ludic space.

The conflation in the romance text is obvious. Everything points to the same image of the hero: his size, his horse, his Hessians, his lazy-eyed gaze. (Freudians

would have no difficulty in recognising him.) What this means, despite the phallic hardness, is that all the details coalesce, flowing into one another, leaking even between texts. Sex is a fluid experience in the romance, with one sensation blending into another, and all the senses being called into play (remember the watching Harry quoted above). This fluidity, this wetness of the text, where hyperbolic adjectives lead into one another, and into the next detail, is perhaps a very female use of the ludic space. Romance code is suited less to philosophical scenes than it is to "fungoid" description, a text that never stops growing. That is Eco's label for this style. Academic writing is often labelled "dry" because it prizes a precise style where each word is entrenched in its denotation. Poetic writing revels in polyvalency, a type of intellectual game. Romance writing never says, as Polly Harvey does in what one reviewer calls "the female put-down of all time: 'You leave me dry'" [5]. The romance text is a wet text.

This leakage between texts, which relies on consumption of many novels by the same reader for it to gain full effectiveness, is encouraged by the books themselves. It is common to find "trailers" for the author's next work at the end of a single-title; LaVyrle Spencer includes whole chapters. Likewise, an author may produce a set of texts, like Roberta Gellis's Roselynde Chronicles, or Coulter's Bride Trilogy, in which characters overlap. In series romances, the novels which are to appear next month are usually summarised on the inside back cover. This ties in with the tradition, discussed above, of romance reading being promoted as an ongoing process that is important to woman's sense of identity.

"From paradigm to periphery--breaking the code"

Jennifer Blake is reviewed in Romantic Times, has step-back covers with clinches, and is considered to be an accomplished romance writer. A native of Louisiana, she often writes about the customs and topography of her state, or of the

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[5] Wm. Ferguson, "Speak for Yourself," Alternative Press July 1993: 31.

state's French heritage. There are large chunks of history woven into the tapestry of her texts, and often the setting directly influences the plot. Her novels are examples of motivated historicals. Royal Passion is set mostly in mid-nineteenth century Paris; the temporal setting must be deduced from either the historical figures who make cameo appearances (Hugo, Balzac, a very young Worth as a mere draper's assistant), or by the political background. The latter, which is complicated, is explained to the reader during the course of the novel. In fact, the text embraces its historical setting, as the omniscient narrative voice plies the reader with information on a variety of topics. Within one eighteen page span (78-96), there is a history of Louis Phillipe's reign, a section on how to properly maintain a stately home (clean woodwork with beer, soft lye soap and sand), and an exposition of the history and language of the gypsies. It is necessary for the reader to comprehend the historical information in order to understand the plot of the novel; even though the required background is provided in the text, the way in which it is presented and absorbed is not ludic. Nor can this text be understood merely by reference to other romance texts; the particular details presented must be assimilated by the reader.

Motivated historicals are less common, and often less predictable, both in language and in plot, than dress historicals. The latter texts have settings that are often as empty as the highly-coloured descriptions. Johanna Lindsey's Defy Not the Heart (a title which presumably attempts to convey a Medieval flavour) opens with the words "Clydon Castle, England, 1192" (1). This implies a specific point on the space-time continuum. What the text presents, however, is a hazy mis-mash of Medieval clichés, including marauders attacking castles, sumptuous banquets, and fierce knights. The given date of 1192 has no bearing on the story whatsoever, except for the fact that marriage is treated as an unbreakable covenant, which is actually anachronistic. Medieval marriage as presented by historians is by no means the till death do us part institution of popular imagination. However, it is useful for the romance to treat marriage in this light.

The motivated historical Fires of Winter by Roberta Gellis opens with the words "My mother was a castle whore" (1). This implies a Medieval setting, and

directly engages the attention of any reader, not just one conversant with the conventions of romance. The specific temporal setting is revealed later in the text, but it could also be deduced from the fact that King Stephen of England and his wife Maud are directly involved in the plot, as they are still trying to quell support for Matilda. (The main action takes place in 1136.)

In Holland's Great Maria, which is not really a romance at all, since the narrative focalisation is exclusively through Maria, both the geographic and the temporal setting must be deduced. References to concurrent popes indicate the time of the Great Schism; the novel appears to begin in the southern Pyrenees, and action progresses to a Saracen port city, but the reader must constantly be on the alert for clues that will allow time and place to be more clearly pinned down. The necessary information for the decoding of the clues is not contained within the text; outside knowledge must be called upon. Likewise, the attitudes and actions presented in the text make no concessions for modern consciousness. Maria is furious when Richard signs a charter to allow the Saracens and Jews to practise their religion because they are infidels. She expects to be beaten by her husband when they argue. The language of the text is almost wholly mimetic, forcing the reader to supply motivations for the characters.

> "Bunny thinks you are a shrew," Richard said. He rubbed his face on his cloak. Their horses lowered their muzzles to sniff the stony sand. Richard dismounted. Maria slid down into his arms. She kissed him.
>
> Their arms around one another, they walked to the shelter of the riverbank. Maria said, "Well, it's not Bunny I'm sitting on the cold ground with" (364).

No paradigmatic romance text would fail to elucidate the emotional sensibilities of the characters in this scene. A couple, sitting on the riverbank at sunset, would discourse copiously. The horses and Richard's arms would be described as big, strong, or well-muscled. In a romance text, the motivations of at least one character in any scene, and often of more than one, are fully exposed, even when the characters themselves are not aware of them.

> He spoke almost without thinking, as a screen for his thoughts. [...] The apple seemed to fly out of her hand. She had no conscious intention of throwing it to him (Blake, Royal Passion, 98).

Throughout the five hundred and nineteen pages of Great Maria, Maria and Richard gradually come to understand one another, and as they understand each other, they grow to love one another. They originally married, as almost strangers, because Maria was an heiress and Richard could protect her lands. This is by far the most commonly used historical Medieval romance plot; both Defy Not the Heart and Fires of Winter use it. However, the language used in Maria lacks the contemporary glamour of the romance code. Likewise, each aspect of Maria's life is given equal importance by the text; her interactions with Richard are just one of the foci of the text. She is a vital character in her own right, without reference to her pair-bond. Unattractive, jarring details are included about the protagonists (when Maria is pregnant, she resents her gross bulk; Richard has scabby hands from sword-fighting) which would destroy the game of the historical romance, by letting too much of the actual world interfere in the text.

"Boys don't cry"

Would the average romance reader be aware of the romance myth as discussed by Krentz's contributors, that is, the idea of the mythological overtones of the heroine as Demeter/Persephone, of the hero as animus? Since there are so many shortcuts embodied in the texts, it is to be suspected that most readers of most texts will elide over the soliloquy-like dilations, in favour of the extended scenes of interaction between the hero and heroine. It is in the former scenes where most of the philosphically-tainted musings of the protagonists are found. Ironically, it is precisely because these scenes are often a retelling of the preceeding scenes in a predictable manner than readers may be tempted to elide over them. This elision is a counterpoint to the dilation of the text, which prolongs the inevitable; the goal of

romance readers seems to be to reach the (satisfactory) end of the text. Of course, the resolution will not be satisfactory if no tension has been built up.

However, a reader who had a special liking for the works of a particular author could then read the same text at much greater depth. The texts can either be read at "fast forward" or at leisure. Given the large number of books romance fans claim they read, it is to be suspected that, although they may be inflating the numbers to suitably impress the researcher, they are also skimming many of their texts. It is therefore important to "grab" the reader, to engage her attention quickly and decisively. The textual triggers, such as the cool-eyed hero with the broad shoulders, raise a host of expectations in the reader which is disproportionate to the actual words in the text. Once she reads such phrases, she can already confidently predict what kind of action will happen next, and this knowledge stimulates her to read further. If the hero is not introduced in an easily recognisable manner, then the author must engage the reader's attention in another fashion that assures her the desired ending will arrive, or she may not bother to read further.

Is the real sin of the romance text, in the eyes of its critics, that it is self-aggrandising? Romance defends itself, at least in terms of the "impossible" plot, by the self-inoculation discussed in the last chapter. In defence of romance's language, the code does not seem so pompous, or so offensive, if one considers its ludic qualities. It is in the interest of writers (and publishers--witness the "Harlequin Plus" of the early eighties) to claim an exalted, almost mystic role for romance. However, they are by and large confronting critics (as in the Krentz anthology). Writers addressing readers, either at conferences, or in Romantic Times, appear to take themselves much less seriously. There is no doubt that whether the mythological echoes are heard or not, the excitement offered by the text appeals to many readers. That this excitement is perhaps only fully appreciated by those who are already conversant with the genre is not a situation unique to romance. As someone who was only introduced to television in late adolescence, situation comedies are another such self-feeding system. The paradigmatic romance text minimises the amount of outside

information required of its reader, yet maximises the use of "codes" specific to the genre.

As with the romance plot, there are faultlines in the romance code that become only more visible when the offending actions are removed. Sebastian in Dangerous, the least abrasive of Quick's heroes, still indulges in typical romance bullying:

> "Is that the effect you wished to create? Were you deliberately trying to make me jealous?"
>
> Prudence was horrified. "Of course not, Sebastian. Why on earth would I wish to make you jealous?"
>
> "A good question." His gaze was bleak and dangerous. "But if that was your goal, I assure you it worked.[...]
> You would not be the first to play such games." Sebastian leaned his head back against the seat and studied her through half-lowered lashes. "Other women more accomplished in such skills have tried those tactics" (214-215).

These statements are often unmotivated both by the immediate situation, and by the characters involved, but the romance code demands they be stated. Readers will therefore know, beyond any possibility of ambiguity, how Sebastian feels about Prudence. In fact, they will know from this one identifying trait how Sebastian feels about many things, such as loyalty in his own inter-personal relationships, promiscuous women, and his relationship with those around him.

This predictability arises from his being an archetype; there are certain elements that he must and will embody. The reader has been assured of this since his first appearance, with immaculate, severe clothes, and an assessing gaze. The insistence on romance code of creating those archetypal males and females may in fact be more regressive than the plots; the hardness of the male is so exaggerated as to be completely artificial. Barlow concedes that "The machismo is something of an illusion" (48), that is, the words of the text are not supported by the actions of the plot. Sebastian is not a particularly dangerous man, and is astonishingly accommodating when it comes to Prudence. The question then becomes why romance writers feel the need to so exaggerate the hardnesses and softnesses of the text. Is it merely a question of sexual and dramatic tension, another part of the game? This appears to be the case, but it must not be forgotten that in some series

romances (those where an Alpha male hero is not likely), males can cry. Tension in those romances is usually generated through a difference of opinion regarding some social topic. One romance reader who adores these "social problem" series romances stated that she finds the excessive use of long adjectives and -ly adverbs in many historicals to be cloying, and she does not like reading them. Perhaps the series will influence the dress historical, or maybe they will stay distinct, retaining their dichotomised gender roles, and their specific language, as part of the game of the text.

The language of romance texts is well-suited to the plots. If Lacan is correct, and one can sift through language to find truth, then perhaps the appeal of the romance can be assessed through its language. With reference to the last three categories discussed in Chapter Two, romance demonstrates a semantic evolution; the wet text code makes any paradigmatic romance immediately identifiable as such. There are also legends embodied in the archetypes of the text, in Demeter and Lucifer and Beauty and the Beast. Finally, distortions abound. Not only are the legends made to reflect upon the particular romance text, but everything in the romance world is superlative, including the masculinity of the hero. The overheated surface of the text, which sweeps the reader along, allows her to overlook improbabilities in the plot. At the same time, the language always urges the reader towards the final neat closure of the text, where male and female can coexist, the lovers of the text along with lovers of legend.

The ending of the romance text is unambiguous.

> "Sophy, tell me again that you have gotten everything you wanted out of this marriage," Julian demanded softly.
>
> "Everything and more, Julian." Her smile was very brilliant in the darkness. "Everything and more" (Seduction 324).

The heroine resists the hero at first, demanding a more equal relationship. In this demand for emancipation, she is demonstrating an awareness of feminist issues. As she becomes more involved with him, she begins to appreciate masculine qualities, such as the feeling of being protected by a much stronger man. Yet, unlike the

liberated heroines of much feminist fiction, she can achieve happiness at the end of the text. She accomplishes this, not by denying either her feminist or her feminine self, but by remaining true to the archetypal female qualities as presented in the romance world. With her nurturing and loyalty, she manages to encompass the formerly stiff, cold, phallic hero.

> "Knowing that you love me is not a source of amusement." Sebastian realized his hands were shaking with the force of the emotion that was pouring through him. "It is my salvation" (Dangerous 337, my emphasis).

The object of the game is accomplished. The hero is saved by the text--by the wet text.

# CHAPTER SIX:

## PLUS ÇA CHANGE:

## the critical eye concludes

Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

Philip Larkin

and if you think that you can tell a bigger tale
I swear to God you'd have to tell a lie...

Tom Waits

"[T]he popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form, a romantic novel just romantic enough" (Frye 305). There can be little doubt, looking at the films, books, visual images and videos created by popular culture, that most people are susceptible, in some degree, to a love story. What distinguishes romance novels from romantic novels is the intensity of the narrative focus on the developing love story, and the certainty of a happy ending. Even though this study has focussed on erotic historical romances, it was stated in the first chapter that the appeal of romance can only be fully understood if all the romance genres are examined as a complete system.

"We missed you hissed the lovecats" [1]

Series romances, as shown in summary by Figure 1.1, are of such a variety and change so rapidly that they may be enjoyed by a wide variety of readers. Romance readers tend to be fairly loyal to the genre, reading an estimated six to eight books a month (Mallet 22). The code of the texts only becomes fully apparent to readers with a repetitive reading pattern, who have read so many similar texts that the inferences and expectations gained from one text can be transferred to another.

The audience is therefore both a receptor and a director of such mass media as romance novels; it is consistent with much popular culture that there is a strong, almost overpowering Anglo influence, both in terms of language and characters represented. Yet the rapidly changing nature of series romances indicates that new elements, such as paranormal occurrences and native mysticism, are being accepted into the system. This variety in content not only allows romance to expand its audience, but also serves, if need be, as a form of justification of the genre.

However, currently most romance best-sellers are erotic historicals, and in these novels, the ludic element of the text is much more evident, especially in the first of the three divisions of the historical sub-genre, based on the texture of the story, that I have proposed. The dress historical uses the historical setting as a glamourous backdrop which both entices the reader and ensures her that the events portrayed are safely divorced from "real" life. The other types of historicals, the motivated historical and the fictionalised biography, rely much more heavily on their background, and are less common.

There are many objections to the romance. Because this industry features almost exclusively female producers and consumers, the feminist criticism of romances is especially hurtful. They insist on taking a content-oriented approach, without accepting the arguments of romance apologists (most of whom are romance

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[1] From the song "The Lovecats", which, in three and a half minutes, parodies many romance motifs, including the phallic male (who moves like a cagey tiger and stalks to kiss). The very effervescence of the music mimics the exuberant language of romance code. The Cure. "The Lovecats." By Robert Smith. Japanese Whispers: The Singles. Sire, CD 25076, 1983.

writers or otherwise involved in the industry) that romances represent a fantasy life, which is clearly divergent from the wishes pertaining to the real one.

Romance novels generate both their plot and their surface sexual tension by means of delineated differences between heroine and hero. The importance of the gender differentiation is understood by readers of the genre. Romances operate in part on the lure of the forbidden, including the seduction fantasy, which relies for its effectiveness on a phallic "Alpha male" hero who offers both the safety of effortless domesticity and the danger of sexual magnetism. The repetition of certain motifs from a woman's existence stems from the fact that romances are usually set in a woman's prime time, when she makes the transition from post-adolescence to established family woman. The main quest in the romance is for the heroine to make the hero recognise his interdependence on others, including those who are different from him.

In order for the fantasy embodied in the texts to be attractive to a reader, she must be operating in an identificatory manner. The romance text encourages such reading in various ways. It usually favours diegesis over mimesis, especially at moments in the text that are crucial to the interaction of the protagonists. There are frequent narrative dilations, which are used to increase the sexual tension by both forestalling the ending and making it more inevitable. The romance reader does not only identify with the heroine; she identifies with whoever has the greatest stake in resolving the conflict at that point in the text. During sex scenes, in an ideal romance, the reader should be able to identify with both protagonists, thereby viewing the scene from the perspective of innocence and experience. The romance text, with its ending already known, is read like a palindrome, both backwards and forwards. The ends can justify the means, because the ending is actively desired by the reader, who must not be cynical about the possibility of a rewarding heterosexual love; it is this fundamental attitudinal difference that separates the romance reader from many feminists.

The ludic aspects of the romance text are seen not only in the highly contrived plots, but also in the language used. Romance description is usually heavily-

overcoded, and made accessible to any reader with limited knowledge outside the genre, by the prompt explanation of most references. The texts give themselves added validity by inserting a mythological dimension to the language; the hero is as handsome as the devil, or called the Fallen Angel, or plays Beast to the heroine's Beauty.

"The absent abstinent text"

Sexuality as presented in the romance angers many feminists. Sexual tension is one of the hallmarks of the genre; it is the source of various kinds of risk. Romance femininity is a belief in a transcendental love, one that can excuse all aberrations on the part of the hero. Sex is an exalted process, and the language used to describe it enforces this notion.

Romances do generally maintain a sexual double standard, with virginity (and defloration) being one of the most prominent motifs. Apologists cite virginity as a trait concomitant with loyalty and courage; the mark of a heroic character. The texts themselves support this conclusion, although not as strongly, since changing sexual mores have affected the sexual content of the romance. The sexual paradigm of romances, focussing as it does on the strong, phallic male who re-orders the heroine's entire existence, and on the supportive, family-orientated female who struggles to reform him, is indicative of the lingering after-effects of a Victorian attitude towards sexuality.

Whether romances are considered pornographic or not depends on whether the power imbalances presented in the text are viewed as fixed and inevitable, or as mutable. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate an ideology with the manifestations of desire, although the latter, in the romance world, become themselves a closed system at the end of the text. In romances, the polarised differences between male and female do not show to the female's disadvantage because the female world view of interdependence and mutual support is shown as superior. Romance writing can be linked with French feminist theories such as those posited by Irigaray in that

fluidity is seen as the essence of femininity. Even the phallic male becomes softened, more fluid, with the impact of the feminine world view.

The romance myth, like romance characters, consists of two disparate threads: a longing towards domesticity and a longing for adventure. In this respect the romance embodies what psycho-analyst Jessica Benjamin calls an ideal love, offering "a dual solution, containment and excitement" (120). To preclude a reader becoming cynical about the romance reading process, the text self-inoculates against disbelief by having the characters voice the same doubts regarding the outcome of the relationship that the reader might have, and therefore co-opting those same doubts to enforce belief in the romance myth.

Romance texts resemble one another closely. The plot functions of the paradigmatic romance can easily be mapped out; the most important scene, the admission of reciprocal love, is one of the very last scenes in the book. Titles are important; they are generally vague (Ravished, Thunder and Roses), but evocative. This is because the titles, like the character's names and descriptions, must indicate to a reader, especially one browsing in a bookstore, that the text is a romance. (Males usually have short, curt-sounding names; heroine's names tend to be longer, lending themselves to diminutives). In dress historicals, many anachronistic elements such as female occupations are presented. As well, the assumptions upon which male power is based are often challenged. Even though a reassessment can and must take place on the part of the hero, no wide-scale readjustment is shown in the textual world; the solutions to political problems are always personal.

The presentation of the historical world is limited to a few, well-known and highly connotative details, for example, gentlemen's clubs and dawn duels in romances which feature Regency settings. The tension created by the unequal social situation, as well as by the sexual attraction between the protagonists, is exploited to the fullest by the text. In the actions depicted before the final resolution, romances admit contradiction, but not, in the final analysis, any uncertainty or doubt.

The heroine successfully meets the challenges she finds in her historical setting by applying her (contemporary) consciousness to them, and by labelling,

challenging, and ultimately containing them. This is not to imply that romances deal in female revenge. Current romances are using the hero as a focalising character more and more often. Clearly the intent is for the reader to identify with both protagonists. This increases the sense of control she has over the fictional world; the game is heightened if she can see both sides of the dichotomy, as well as the inevitable outcome. The ending of the text is a catharsis, with earlier tension being resolved into a mutually satisfying emotional pact.

Likewise, there is a tacit agreement between reader and text that some inequalities are better off banished, especially in historicals. The hero, usually a landowner, must always be responsible towards his lands and those on them. Child labour and prostitution, if mentioned, are always condemned. Romances view history as a progression towards the present. The present is always the reference point for dress historical texts, as an examination of the language used, especially in dialogue, proves.

Romance apologists claim that the textual descriptions refer not only to the actual textual world but also to mythological underpinnings, such as the rape of Persephone. Certainly, there is a frequent use of oxymoron in the romance ("ruthless tenderness") which implies a split between fabula and récit. Such turns of phrase are part of the group of textual triggers which correspond to important plot functions. The romance text rarely defies the expectations it raises, and to aid readers even further, scenes often contain many words with similar connotations, which enforce the "correct" interpretation of the dominant emotion. The text, in effect, explains itself as it goes along. One does not need prior knowledge, except of other romance texts, in order to appreciate what one is reading.

However, the overinflated word use at the surface of the text can be misleading. The hero is described as hard and ruthless, but often his actions are not quite as drastic as the language used to describe them. During sex scenes, it is the female whose descriptors gain in degree of determination, while the male becomes gentler as the scene progresses. There must remain just enough difference to stimulate heterosexual piquancy.

This highly-charged, yet evolving interaction between the protagonists is the main focus of the romance text. Nothing else, either ordinary, conventional details of setting, or extraordinary, paranormal events like ghosts or mystic healing is the focus of as much narrative attention. The romance, which relies heavily on its own specific style of description and on easily-accessible mythic references, has little need of straightforward psychological realism to ensure that its readers accept the text. Perhaps the readers are not consciously aware of the ludic expectations they are bringing to the text, but they could scarcely fail to be aware of the humour which is becoming more prevalent. Even if language is phallocentric, and play within langauge is therefore confined by the rules of the masculine, symbolic world, romance novels make use of the permission granted them, and frolic freely.

Romance heroines often read romance novels; this underlines the sense that reading such novels has always been a way for women to establish a collective identity. Within the text the identity of characters, especially the hero, who appears in fewer guises than the heroine, is established in part through the conflation of the conventional details used to describe him, from his appearance, his clothing, to the way he deals with those around him. Romance language suits the needs of its readers, since the considerable leakage between texts allows the reader to choose her mode of reading, either "fast-forward", or at greater depth. And at the end of the text, when the hero is surrounded by the same lush, fluid words that describe the heroine, it can be seen that the dual road to excitement and containment goes both ways; each of the romance protagonists has contained the other.

According to Fowler, "statements about genre are statements about the genre at a particular stage" (47), which is certainly true as regards this study of mass-market romance novels. However, he also notes that "the basis of resemblance lies in literary tradition" (42). I feel that romances form such a large corpus that they have a tradition of their own. Since the particular mutation with which I am most concerned was first manifest in 1972, I have focussed attention on books written since that date, but even the very small segment of the romance world I have examined is changing, and rapidly.

Yet there still remains a romance tradition. Part of the attraction of "spicy" Regencies such as Quick's lies in the "abstinence" of traditional Regencies where the motivation of the text (sexual courtship leading to permanent pair-bonding) is wholly absent or repressed. This brings to mind Lacan's assertion that "l'inconscient [...] est marqué par un blanc" (259) which in turn leads one to think of the association of white and virginity. Virgin, which in German is, quite blatantly, Jungfrau. Those abstinent Regencies were stories of a young woman's entrance into the world par excellence.

They are no longer particularly popular. Instead, the heavy-breathing Temptation and Desire dominate the short categories sales. In some of these texts, the sexual interaction of the protagonists occurs so rapidly that the only sense of a barrier one gets is the method of contraception. This shows that the romance text does respond to changes in society, and also that the motivations for reading romances can change focus. There is no longer any need for Harlequin to claim its novels are educational. Instead, the romance genre is becoming more self-reflexive, claiming an active role in the establishment of women's identity.

"Between animals and angels"

Romance apologists may take heart from the fact that some of their pet theories are echoed by a critic as venerable as Northrop Frye. "The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes" (304), an assertion which echoes claims of a mythic underpinning, and gives credence to belief in a Jungian mode of reading, whereby the hero is the heroine's animus. He refers to the "subjective intensity" (ibid.) of the romance, which makes one think of the codes used so frequently today.

Yet Frye can scarcely have been thinking of the romance novels published today when he was writing Anatomy of Criticism, unless, like many romance protagonists, he had the secret of time-travel. The fact remains that the definitions of genre, although elusive, nevertheless form a link between both mass-market novels

produced earlier and between literary and para-literary works. Given the upheavals the academic institution is currently facing, it is no longer a question of academic elitism to try and dismiss, without elucidating, phenomena of popular culture. It may very well be a matter of academic survival to demonstrate that the tools of literary criticism, developed to unravel the mysteries of high culture, can also profitably be used to examine Everyman's (or in the case of the romance, Everywoman's) culture.

One aspect of cultural linkage that I have tried to draw attention to in a peripheral manner by many of my chapter division titles, is that romances, in themselves an intricate system, are part of the whole amazing complex of popular culture. Just as romances tend to be divided from the mainstream by virtue of their gender appeal, music is often divided along age lines (as well as race and culture), with grunge being the latest expression of the disenfranchised. How many romance mythemes survive in the lyrics of pop music? One thinks of the latest mother-goddess of rock Polly Harvey. The romance hero is recreated to serve a different audience by many pop musicians, most notably in the Gothic, dishevelled and alienated persona of Robert Smith (who, incidentally, writes lyrics with such conflation of style and content that romance texts, in comparison, look positively dry).

Romance steals motifs from film, or is it the other way round? Dead Again (dir. Kenneth Branagh, Paramount, 1992) could very well be a Silhouette Shadows; certainly the hero's attitude towards the paranormal happenings in the heroine's past life regressions are pure romance. So is having the villain disguised as a (sexually) harmless man. Pretty Woman (dir. Gary Marshall, Touchstone, 1990) is a seventies Harlequin, with the exception, of course, that the heroine would be wrongfully accused of being a prostitute. Three scenes that are archetypally romance are those where the heroine confronts the hero over his feelings regarding the death of his father, when she whispers "I love you" to an apparently sleeping hero, and when he punches out the bad guy who is trying to compromise her. All three scenes can be found in many romances; Dangerous by Amanda Quick contains all three.

If film uses many romance stylemes, even if more stylishly, what does this indicate about the romance code? Series romances, especially the newer American

ones, are often less heavily adjectival than historical romances, yet they maintain the preoccupation with food and clothing that has been a romance hallmark from the early Seventies onwards. Is this preoccupation, like the setting in historicals, a distancing device used to seduce the reader into accepting more extreme plot devices? If this is so, then what is one to make of hybrid romance and science fiction, where many of the romance stylemes are used? (Examples of such writers would include Anne McCaffrey, Barbara Hambly, Nancy Kress, Elizabeth Lynn and Stephen R. Donaldson).

The popularity of such writers, and the way in which romance itself is changing, once again begs the question of audience participation. It appears likely, given the effort needed to seek out books and read them, that romance readers are more often active than passive. Used bookstores do a brisk trade in recycled romances, but novels by certain authors (e.g., Roberta Gellis) are not often to be found there. Audience consumption even dictates the physical appearance of the books, as seen by step-back covers, and the new Harlequin photographic covers.

For all the conventions of the genre, including the often conventional morality found in romances regarding sexuality and the family, romance deals with taboo. The "social problem" series and some contemporary mainstreams deal with inflammatory topics, such as a younger man becoming involved with a post-menopausal woman (therefore one who can no longer bear children, and allow him to reproduce himself, as in Byrne's The Firebirds), or a woman who chooses to raise her severely handicapped child instead of institutionalising her (Korbel, A Rose for Maggie). One of the most common taboos invoked is that of incest. This spectre was raised during the discussion of the hero; he is either a stranger or someone well-known to the heroine. In mainstreams, there is often more than one heroine; the two are often sisters, sometimes twins. The two women then form the base of a triangle with the hero at the apex. In Blake's Love and Smoke, it is a father and a son who vie for the affection of the heroine.

This use of taboo is interesting; are the readers aware of it or not? Even the standard romance use of sentimentality in projecting the idea of a perfect union is

reminiscent of a religious experience. If religious transcendence is a literary taboo, as is indicated on the back cover of Rumer Godden's In This House of Brede (London: MacMillan, 1969), does this have anything to do with the taboo on the romantic transcendant? And if the transcendant is scorned in all its forms in literature, then why is the rational so prized? The novel was a form originally shaped by women, as not only Mitchell but the many bibliographies of female popular fiction before 1900 testify; why have contemporary women writers accepted to play in a tightly-controlled, symbolic space?

There are other elements in the romance besides the lure of the forbidden. The targets of the humour in romance fiction would bear close scrutiny; as I have suggested, it touches upon areas which are also a source of tension in the text, and might therefore be deduced to be a source of tension for readers in their own lives. Humour is also one way of confronting the taboo. Although it is not often used in this manner in romances that I have noticed, perhaps it will become so. In one of the many romances that have sunk to the bottom of my memory, the now otherwise-forgotten heroine snaps to an annoying man, "I would rather have a voluntary episiotomy than go on a date with you!" This is a very female joke. If romance novels are being less marginalised, both in terms of consumption and in terms of reproduction in other popular media than they were twenty years ago, does it mean that a female vision of gender roles is being stealthily propagated? Or are romance proponents themselves stooges of patriarchal controllers? Or is it, after all, the audience that is running the show? Whichever it is, the lovecats are not lonely anymore.

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# Appendix

Examples of plagiarism found in paradigmatic romance texts.

Example 1.

Source text: Reay Tannahill. Sex in History (1980, New York: Scarborough, 1982). Reference work.

At her house near Portland place, she kept her rods in water "so that they should be green and supple. She had a dozen tapering whip thongs, a dozen cat-o'-nine-tails studded with needle points, various kinds of thin supple switches, leather straps as thick as traces, currycombs and oxhide straps studded with nails, which had become tough and hard from constant use, also holly and gorse and a prickly evergreen called 'butcher's bush.' During the summer, glass and Chinese vases were kept filled with green nettles." [endnote reference] Mrs. Berkeley catered for more than the make-believe masochist.

But her great invention (in 1828) was the Berkley Horse, or Chevalet, which was essentially an extending ladder (adjustable to the customer's height), propped up and comfortably padded. The client was tied to it so that his face projected through one space and his genitals through another. The "governess" stood behind and administered the whip to back or buttocks, according to taste, while a scantily dressed girl sat in front and massaged his cock and bollocks. [footnote reference] [...]

One of the better-known early flagellation manuels, Venus Schoolmistress, or Birchen Sports... (386-387).

Romance text: Mary Jo Putney. Silk and Shadows (New York: Onyx/NAL, 1991).

[...] she proudly displayed her collection of whip thongs, leather straps, needle-pointed cat-o'-nine-tails, currycombs, and much more. Her birch rods were stored in water to keep them supple, and the rooms were decorated with elegant vases full of stinging nettles that could be used if the customer wished [...]

The lady's pièce de résistance was an apparatus called the Cambridge Chevalet, which she had designed herself. A cross betwen a rack and a free-standing ladder, it was padded and could be adjusted to a man's height. When the customer was strapped in place for his punishment, holes in the rack allowed a scantily clad assistant to caress him in appropriate places [...] Charmed, she insisted on giving him a copy of a flagellation classic called Venus Schoolmistress, or Birchen Sports (60-61).

There is no reference made anywhere in the Putney book to Tannahill's text.

Example 2.

Source text: Cecelia Holland. Great Maria (New York: Knopf, 1972). Romantic Bildundgsroman.

Romance text: Penelope Williamson. Keeper of the Dream (New York: Dell, 1992).

Note: the gender roles have been reversed in Willamson's version of the scene.

Holland:

She shook a little of the scaly brown powder from the leather packet [...] she sprinkled a pinch of the dust onto the surface of the wine. It did not look like very much (400).

Williamson:

She caught him tipping a small leather packet over one of the wine cups [...] all she saw was wine with a faint brown scum floating on the surface (444-445).

Holland:

"What are you doing," Richard said, behind her. She jumped straight in the air. Whirling to face him, she hid both hands behind her back. He reached around her [...] "What are you doing? You are poisoning me" (400)

Williamson:

He whipped around suddenly, his fist closing over the packet and his hand going behind his back. She advanced on him [...] her hand snaked behind him [...] "Are you trying to poison me?" (444-445).

Holland:

"A love potion. To keep me faithful or to make me strong?" (401).

Williamson:

"Ooh, a love philter [...] Have I demanded so much of your poor male member lately?" (445).

Holland:

He lowered the cup and drank. Maria waited, keen with interest. He set the cup to her lips and she drank three swallows. He finished the rest. They stared at each other. She searched his face.

"Do you feel anything happening?" he asked.

"No." Whole wine always made her head whirl. "Do you?"

"Well, not reall-yeeow!" He sprang at her.

Maria shrieked (401).

Williamson:

He shrugged and downed two healthy swallows of the wine.

She watched him carefully. The effigies in the chapel had more expression in their faces than he did on his. "Well?"

His eyes widened slightly. "I feel a sort of tingling."

"A tingling?" [...]

He leapt at her, and she shrieked (446).